THE TOLL OF THE RIVER

ANDREW FIRTH

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES

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To Mr. & Mrs.
H. T. Coey
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By

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THE TOLL OF THE RIVER

CHAPTER I

AT six o'clock in the evening Maurice Harvey lay in a long chair on the poop of the big dahabeah that was the official quarters of the Hellal section of the Irrigation Circle to which he belonged. The red and white striped awning did not save Maurice now from the setting sun which slanted beneath the fringe that hung so still on this breezeless evening, while the Nile lapped lazily round the rudder of the boat. But he, having been out along the canal-banks all day, did not move as the horizontal rays struck his face. He put up a hand over his eyes and lay dead-tired while the purple gloom of a hot Egyptian night wafted down upon the mirror-like waters. A sultry glow deepened behind the western hills that hemmed in the great silent river, and suddenly a blood-red moon rose up to look through the heat-haze upon the drooping world. Maurice had dropped his hand when the sun went down and he turned his eyes to the golden pathway that slowly vacillated forth from under his very feet into the gathering dusk up-stream. The moon hung, it seemed, within reach.

"Looks inviting!" he said with a whimsical smile. "I think I'll accept your lure, old lady!"

In the bathroom below he could hear his servant

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busy over preparations for his usual evening ablutions, and he called down to the man to leave the bath. It would do for Jameson when he came in. The coldest liquid on the dahabeah was warm this weather.

"I go into the river!" he concluded, on his way to his cabin with his terrier at his heels.

A minute later saw him sway like a slender white stem on the foot-high ledge at the gangway and disappear into the black oily waters with scarcely a splash. And for the moment he, at any rate, was cool. His terrier, Nick, stood at the open gangway and whimpered, sure that his master was going to perdition. Maurice turned on his back and whistled as he floated downstream on the sleepy current, and though in the fast-falling twilight he could only dimly see the ghostly form of the great graceful boat he heard the plunge and then Nick's vigorous threshing, as he paddled out into the river.

"Not *on* me, old man. *Beside* me, Nick!" said his master when they met. Sometimes Nick had shown inclination to climb upon Maurice's chest or back for a rest, but Maurice of necessity had broken him of that. And now they swam side by side in the dark water, like brothers. Maurice could rest floating, but as Nick had not that advantage, being obliged to swim all the time, his master turned to the bank after going some distance and they climbed through the narrow shallows up on the terraced shore and Nick sat on his haunches panting between the knees of his master, both securely hidden from view above by the perpendicular mud terrace against which Maurice had set his back. There they watched the moonlight wavering on the water and listened to the cicalas shrilling over the land.

Maurice was thinking of things far away, so that at first he did not hear the voices close by that caused Nick to growl low and wriggle. Maurice's knees closed automatically on the growl and crushed the dog to silence. No fellahin and few Egyptians save those who were Europeanized spoke in these tones. There might be women with them.

"Yes, the Moufettish (inspector) is much disturbed on account of Ramzy the Copt, who complains loudly that he cannot get permission to work his pump upon his land and therefore his crops are drying up. Who can tell how that paper came to be at the bottom of the oldest file? Ho, ho!"

"But why then," said another voice, "is Ramzy so foolish? He knows all others make us gifts according to their degree! Why is he then so miserly?"

"He trusts in Havvy Moufettish (Harvey Inspector), who is his friend, he proclaims aloud. He knows not that Havvy Moufettish is *our* friend also and holds the balance true!"

A bull-frog commenced his love-song at the wavelets' edge, and Maurice gripped Nick's loins tighter between his knees as the dog struggled furiously, with all his hunting instincts aflame.

"What is that noise?" said one of the voices with a tinge of alarm.

"Art thou afraid?" mocked the other. "Mayhap it is that dog of a Copt spying upon us. Go see, if thou art afraid! Yea, Havvy holds the balance true, though he accepts nought from our hands."

"Bah! Are we not thou the nephew of Kahiri Pasha and I the cousin of Bilêl?"

Maurice's rising wrath had communicated itself to the dog, who with one tremendous effort burst free and went like an arrow for the bull-frog, making noise enough for twenty dogs. The frog went with a "plop!" into the water and Nick rushed after him to thresh yelling back and forth.

A slim white column in the moonlight, Maurice rose leisurely to his feet and called in his dog. Then he said "Good evening!" over his shoulder as he stepped into the shallows.

"Good evening, sir!" called each in turn, wondering mightily how long he had been there and whether he had heard all they had said. His voice was no more perturbed than ever for all the white-hot rage in his heart.

"Do you often go in the river, sir?" said the nephew of the Kahiri.

"Sometimes, in summer."

"Then you swim well, sir," said the cousin of Bilêl, desirous of delaying Maurice as he waded out in order to sound him if possible. "There is a proverb that teaches: he who would swim with the Nile must swim warily!"

"Well, I swim against it," answered Maurice, "to-night."

They made no further attempt to keep him. He had heard all! And they watched him strike out into the water in the wake of his dog. Why had he added that qualifying word "to-night"? It suggested some deep-seated menace, they knew not what. Maurice was of those who seldom say a word unmeant.

The water under him and around him calmed his feelings, telling him, as it always did, what a mite he

really was in the scheme of the Universe, and somehow he found the message soothing.

Jameson was in a deck-chair smoking with a paper outspread before him when Maurice appeared from his cabin.

"Dressed for dinner again?" said he, teeth clinched on his pipe. "Well, I won't! I believe you do it to annoy me! No ladies are present, you madman!"

Maurice pointed to a large photograph of Mrs. Jameson looking out of its silver frame with sober eyes under delicate arched brows, which stood conspicuous on a locker.

"There's your wife! Upon my word, Jameson, I believe you forget her existence sometimes!"

"No fear of that while you're about!" came the retort from behind the newspaper.

Maurice, with his hand upon the newly arrived pile of papers from Home, turned his steady dark eyes upon the news sheet whence had come that broadside and waited for the next. False alarm! No intention had barbed the chance-flung word. Jameson was sincerely absorbed in the "latest intelligence."

"I *am* of some use then somewhere," remarked Maurice with composed acerbity.

Jameson lowered the *Daily Wire* to look at his colleague with amused toleration. "What, are you in the wars?"

"No——" Maurice was going to say more, but checked himself at sight of the white-clad, red-sashed servant come to lay the table. Jameson glanced at the man, so silent, impassive and busy.

"He knows no English!" he grumbled after the

white figure had vanished down the companion-way to fetch the soup.

"How do we know that?" countered Maurice. "I rather think he does. I've noticed one or two things about him. Bilêl seems to know his name too."

"Bilêl!" and Jameson gathered his lean length together to sit up full of interest. "Why should Bilêl put him here? He knows as much about the work as we do! There's nothing else to spy about!"

Maurice narrowed his eyes with intense bitterness. "You've not been here as long as I have, Jameson! A native never goes straight at anything. He may care about nothing but the water, but he'll welcome any little handle in our private life that'll help him put the screw on us!"

Jameson was playful. "*You'd* better be careful, Harvey!"

Maurice's short dry "Why?" broke from him ere he could catch it up, and he sat holding himself quiet by force of will.

Jameson thought he was angered by the suggestion. "I was fooling!" he smiled. "Never mind, Maurice! You're getting jumpy. Time you went on leave, old man!"

Maurice gradually let himself go. Neither was that an intentional hit.

Jameson's wits were busy. "Can't we kick the fellow out if he's a spy?" he produced presently.

"But if he *is* one very likely the next would be too. He's a good suffragi (servant), anyhow. Keep your things locked, that's all, and your tongue as well."

This view was reasonable. "Who's been at what?" he inquired, proceeding to the real subject in hand.

"After dinner," promised Maurice, as the white figure reappeared.

He kept his word when later in the evening they sat alone over coffee and cigarettes on the upper deck in the moonlight.

"And I didn't smile!" he finished. "I'm not smiling now!"

"Of course," proffered Jameson at length, "we must wink at a lot, and Ramzy is only one of a crowd. And he's just as ready to do *them* down if he can." He pulled at his pipe. "But I don't see why he should lose his crops which we are there to give him, because he hasn't paid toll enough according to the idea of our assistant engineers!"

Maurice did not care a rap for any idea of any engineer. He lifted one leg over the long arm of his chair and reasoned logically. In not yielding enough bakhsheesh Ramzy *was* doing them down, for he knew that the moment his plaint reached an English ear he would be acceded his rights despite all the others could do. "Oh, this is a filthy country!" and Maurice flung himself out of his chair to stand with feet apart and hands clenched behind him regarding his friend with a face of savage exasperation.

"If you hate it as much as that why don't you go?" recommended the other, chewing his pipe stem.

Without reply Maurice walked off to the rail and stood there looking out upon the moonlit Nile calmly flowing. His gaze went to the graceful palm-trees just silhouetted velvety grey on an island opposite, and

Jameson watched his neat figure—Maurice was a small but compact man—itself clear-cut against the silvery night. It stood unnaturally still for fully five minutes. Then it turned.

"I love it, worse luck!" said Maurice, half laughing, half bitter. "I've been here ten years! If I left, where could I go and what could I do? I can't do anything else!"

Jameson was of opinion, when people talked like that, it was better to go on leave as soon and as long as possible.

Maurice swung round upon his heel and looked at his friend resentfully. "My leave's all fixed and you know it!" said he. "I go when you've come back!"

"Go in my place," said Jameson.

"Wouldn't your wife bless me?"

"You need leave more than I do."

Maurice let that pass unchallenged. He gave a brief and final negation to the proposal and retreated to the railing once more, where he leant with one arm wrapped round the awning-post, facing Jameson in the dark. He had not applied for leave till he knew the first relay was arranged; he preferred not to be in England at the same time as the Jamesons, for then it was almost impossible not to meet, and though he fervently longed to do so he knew also it was a futile course to pursue. If he exchanged his period of leave with Jameson he would then be in England with Mrs. Jameson alone, an alternative he would not face.

"Your wife's coming out in the autumn, I suppose?" he said after a pause. "How long has she been away?" though he knew to a day.

"A year in October."

"And ill all that time?"

"She's well enough now for Henley!"

Silence fell while the crickets sang and the bull-frogs boomed and the scents of flowering trees drifted down from a native garden on the bank. Nick pattered back from his dinner forward in the galley and hopped up into the chair his master had vacated. There he heaved a happy sigh. Presently, however, he raised his black and tan muzzle and looked across at Maurice. Then he slowly got out of his comfortable resting-place and went to sit before his master with cocked ears.

"Nick thinks as I do," remarked Jameson, "something the matter with you. Harvey, go to bed! You don't rest enough. Give yourself a chance!"

The dog planted his forepaws against Maurice's thigh and nuzzled up close.

"I think I'm going over the office papers to-morrow," said Maurice, caressing the moist muzzle mechanically. "I want to look over the files. Will you take on my pony and go out in my stead for the day? I can rail down to Cairo and back easily between sunrise and night."

Jameson laughingly bade him mind what he was about with regard to Ramzy. Kahiri and Bilêl would assuredly accuse him anonymously of favouritism and probably of corruption.

Maurice smiled, albeit a trifle wearily. "Let 'em!" said he, and added a vivid condemnation of native ways in general and Ramzy's in particular.

Next morning when Abdul Kahiri and Mahmud

Bilêl saw Jameson's lank figure astride Maurice's satin-skinned pony the doubt was settled in their minds once for all. Havvy Moufettish had heard and stored in his mind all they had said and had gone to take the part of Ramzy, that dog of a Copt.

But Ramzy's crops were now beyond repair, and for succour he must go to a money-lender.

"Do thou, O my brother," said Mahmud Bilêl, "go about to find who that money-lender is and of him take some small bakhsheesh for us both because we have sent him trade."

CHAPTER II

MAURICE arrived in gusty, bleached Cairo in the middle of a dust-storm, and at the office found the Chief of all Irrigation deep in confabulation with Gregory of the Public Works.

"Hallo, Harvey, what are you here for? You ought to be out in District!" The Chief's memory for detail was almost terrifying. He had every man's schedule at his fingers' ends.

"Come up for half a day, sir! Something doesn't quite tally, and I want to verify our side of it!"

The Chief smiled and nodded and went on talking to Gregory about a regulator which had burst.

"Clever fellow, Harvey!" he said as soon as the door had closed upon Maurice. "Keen as mustard!"

To the accompaniment of the cracking of whips in the street below and the ringing of sherbet-sellers' brass plates, Maurice sorted the files together with O'Callaghan, the Director of Pumps. When they found Ramzy's permit at the bottom—even as Abdul Kahiri had said—of the oldest file the date on it was enlightening. Dated and signed six weeks back it was much younger than all the other papers on the file.

"See that!" and the two men's eyes met. A native clerk came in at the moment and glancing from one to

the other went to the second desk and began to pull out drawers as if in search of something.

"Didn't I give you this paper to be sent out to Ramzy at Hellal six weeks ago?" demanded O'Callaghan. "Why is it still here?" His blue eyes snapped.

The clerk took the paper and looked at it slowly. "It—has been overlooked," he said a little uncertainly. "I will see to it at once."

"Don't forget!" said Maurice shortly.

"You'll be fined a week's pay," remarked O'Callaghan impersonally. "It's your business *not* to overlook anything, Farag."

Maurice saw the quick covert look ere the man departed without a word of surprise, regret or apology.

The morning was far spent. Indeed stifling noon filled the room.

Ramzy of course would not understand that mere justice had been done. (Had it? thought Maurice.) He would take the matter as a pure favour to him, and be obsequiously grateful in consequence. To the Eastern mind justice as Justice never reveals herself. Justice is favouritism at best and at worst is sale to the highest bidder.

Maurice went into the noonday glare outside, and made for the Club. Coming out was the genial Bonner, the Irrigation Chief.

"Met for the second time to-day!" he cried. "Found your tally, Harvey? That's good. How long have you before your train goes? Oh, well, time enough to lunch with us at Gezira. Come along! Oh, nonsense!"

Despite his murmurs Maurice found himself whirled

across the big bridge guarded by its green bronze lions, and ere he had spoken three sentences to the Chief the motor drew up in a shady garden before the honeysuckle-covered porch of Bonner's white villa.

The hall was delightfully cool and dark and still. Bonner raised his powerful voice to inform his wife wherever she might be that there would be a guest to lunch.

"Make yourself at home—a drink—a wash?"

But Maurice had done all that at the office. He wanted to sit quiet, and so went alone into the drawing-room, threading his way slowly, almost blindly after the strong light outside, among the little Moorish tables dotted over the thick carpet that deadened his footfalls. He sat down, thinking himself alone, but a girl arose from an escritoire and with a swish of light skirts came forward composedly, tall, supple, brown-haired and hazel-eyed.

"Aunt Leila's with mother upstairs," she said, starting for the door. "I'll go and tell them——"

"No, no, don't! Please don't!" he said hastily. "They know I'm here. They'll come when they want to. Meantime——"

"Meantime," she put in with a wonderful smile, taking the chair he drew up for her—in all things Maurice was punctilious—"tell me about yourself. You are looking a little tired, Mr. Harvey! What have you been doing? Too much, as usual?" Her tone was gently chiding, and her sidewise judicial glance very kindly.

"Just the same old routine," he answered. And there came a silence.

"How is Mrs. Jameson?"

For just a moment too long the silence remained unbroken. Then without stirring a muscle he replied, his voice even and dead. Jameson had told him last night that she was enjoying Henley very much and that she was coming out in the autumn.

"Ah, it will be pleasant to have her out here again," came softly.

To that Maurice made no rejoinder. He lay quiet in his corner of the Chesterfield sofa, while his heart beat so that he could feel it all over his body. Miss Brayton was looking meditatively at his foot that hung from the leg he had crossed. He also looked at it and saw that, very slightly, it wagged with each quick pulse-beat. He uncrossed his knees and planted both feet on the floor. *She* knew of his regard for Mrs. Jameson, then. If she did, who saw them both so seldom, who else knew also? Had she told any one of it?

"Are you feverish, Mr. Harvey?" she asked at length. Somehow he liked her solicitude.

"No, but I *am* rather fagged. I'll be glad to get my leave." Then to his own astonishment he found himself adding: "That will be after the Jamesons come back. He replaces me."

"Ah!" she breathed easily. "You are not to be spared anything this year! You'll get all the heat."

"There are worse things than heat."

"Yes."

There came another pause. Maurice was thankful the room was so dark, but her hazel eyes gleamed quick and watchful in the pale face above the white folds of her muslin gown. Suddenly he realized she was beautiful.

"You are going home soon, I suppose?" he began again. "You won't be sorry either, I should think? It's too hot now to be pleasant!"

"There are worse things than heat!" She returned him his own speech. "There are Continental watering-places, for instance!"

Her intonation was so dryly droll that he broke into a low murmur of laughter.

"Mother must go to them for her arthritis, poor soul; but I don't think the old-fashioned Hell can exist any more. The Devil broke it up into many pieces long ago and flung them broadcast over Europe and called them 'bads' and 'brunns' and 'heims.' His malice is much more far-reaching nowadays! Bunyan's Christian had really nothing to complain of!"

Maurice's ready sense of humour turned his murmur of mirth into strangling gurgles, for he never laughed loud. He was still gasping when voices outside heralded the approach of host and hostess. Mrs. Brayton was with them, tall as her daughter, decided in an aggressive way and grey-clad. She never shook hands, for her fingers were gnarled with her malady. Edith did all her correspondence, dressed her and attended to necessary sewing, under much direction. During lunch Maurice watched mother and daughter, admiring Miss Brayton's calm sweetness. Once or twice she caught his eyes resting upon her in a way she could not interpret. But she smiled encouragingly, all the same.

"Hallo, hallo, Harvey! Off your oats!" cried Bonner, as Maurice refused the second course. "This is only May, not August! You're beginning too early! Don't worry so much!"

The inspector felt himself the target of all eyes and flushed deeply. "I'm not worrying about anything, sir!" he responded, looking at the nasturtium table decorations. "What is there to worry about?"

"Certainly nothing; but you're looking as baked as if there was!"

"I'm quite all right!" said Maurice, with a note of defiance in his voice.

"Yes, uncle, he is all right!" reinforced Miss Brayton, and as she did so she met his eyes. His flush was dying away. "What on earth should Mr. Harvey worry about?" and suddenly he knew that his secret was safe with her. She was telling him so.

But after lunch, when the ladies had gone to lie down or otherwise disport themselves, Bonner laid a heavy hand upon his junior's arm, detaining him at table when he would have sought the cool verandah.

"Now what's this nonsense that brought you out of District to-day?" he demanded plainly, brusquely.

"Only that a Copt who applied six weeks ago for his pump hadn't got his permit last night——"

"Six weeks, eh? Who told you?"

"No one. By accident I overheard two second-grade engineers talking about it," answered the inspector.

Bonner did not speak for a minute. The young man stood on the black sheepskin rug with his hands easily clasped behind him. Out on the verandah the fat grey parrot was whistling "Yip-I-Addy-I-Ay" and the creeping geraniums extended their long green arms invitingly from hanging wire baskets.

"Give me their names," said Bonner at length.

Maurice jumped to attention. The black notebook

was out on the table and his Chief was glowering at him from under grizzled brows. First, however, he demanded to know what the Copt had done.

"Refused to pay what they hold he should——"

"*All* or only part?"

"They called him miserly, sir. I conclude he refused to pay more than a certain amount."

"Abdul Kahiri and Mahmud Bilêl, you say! Surely they've just come from one of the Universities?"

"Yes, sir. They've been in our Circle not quite six months."

"H'm!" A thoughtful grunt. Then he wrote for a moment in his notebook, closed it with a snap and proceeded to favour Maurice with gems of philosophy quarried out of his thirty years' experience.

As all natives were alike when it came to matters of administration, it would be no use to throw out these two for the crime of following the nature of their kind. The only thing to be done was to keep them—at least they had some acquaintance with European ways—and check them as much as possible. "But don't do it too much!" he warned. "They can make things dashed unpleasant for you if they wish. We can't go through this world always at the pace we like. We've got to fit in with others. You're looking very fagged, Harvey. We can't have you knocking up like this at the very start of the hot weather! Don't take it so hard, man! You're battering yourself against a brick wall! Go easy, go easy!"

Maurice sat down on his chair, put his elbows on the table and looked at the Chief, his chin on his clenched fists.

"I'm going as easy as I know how, sir," he replied. "But it riles me they think because they are relatives of pashas they can do as they please!"

"Call that taking things easy!" smiled Bonner, then sobered. "But they're right. Those pashas are friends of the Power that is, and if I tried to get those two expelled from the Service my orders would be traversed." Maurice threw up his head sharply. "They would, Harvey! So what can I do? When they get too bad we must promote them to free ourselves."

Maurice laughed bitterly. "*We* get promoted only by merit!" he said.

"Egypt for the Egyptians!" jibed Bonner. "But there it is! No use talking! Mind Ramzy doesn't pull you into a hole, that's all!" He rose. "Go easy. Now what *is* that bird shrieking about?"

The ladies were out on the verandah, the two elder seated in the shade while Edith exhorted the parrot to his wildest efforts. The time came all too soon for Maurice to depart. He refused the motor, as it was to take Mrs. and Miss Brayton to Mena presently, and walked through the quiet backroads till he came to the cab-stand behind the big hotel, and drove to the station from there.

Bonner stood on the steps, with hands in pockets, head tilted well back and big cigar pointing to the colourless noonday skies.

"I'd—I'd give a month's pay," he delivered himself, "to know why that young fellow is depressed! Prospects good, health fair, nothing to worry him but that paltry pump certificate. I suppose you"—to Edith—"can't throw any light on the subject?"

She snipped a thread of her linen embroidery before she made answer. "No, I can't. Why should you think I could possibly know?" and she looked up coolly. But her eyes were guarded.

He was biting his already short moustache as he studied her. "You haven't by chance refused him?"

She smiled a very little. "He has not honoured me with an opportunity," she remarked quietly, but for the life of her she could not control the flush his words flung upon her.

Bonner watched till her flush, not confusion—Edith never allowed any one to confuse or bully her—died down and then, having drawn his own inferences of her knowledge from her demeanour, he retired to his sanctum to work until sunset. The thing that was upsetting Maurice was evidently in Edith's opinion not matter for a referendum. The Chief of Irrigation docketed and stowed this reflection in his mind just as he did his written note about Abdul Kahiri and Mahmud Bilêl in the pigeon-holes of his desk, for future reference. Harvey was a scrupulous, conscientious fellow.

In the train Maurice felt neither one nor the other. Not being a perfect philosopher he thoroughly disliked train-travelling, of which he did a great deal and never became accustomed to. He spent the jolting hours in his furnace-like corridor compartment in meditation upon Edith Brayton's smiling hazel eyes and level dark brows as compared with Lucy Jameson's sober clouded blue ones under their pencilled arches. Some one once said those eyes were like twin country-cousins looking out of the Burlington Arcade. Maurice did not recognize the simile. He also spent some thought upon

the next possible moves of Bilêl, Kahiri and Ramzy, for he knew their game was as yet but begun.

Ramzy's move was the first that met his notice, and as might be expected in the East was an unanticipated assault. It was past nine at night when Maurice stepped across the plank that connected the dahabeah with the bank and Nick leapt upon him with fervour.

"He's been twice to the station looking for you," greeted Jameson from the table, which was littered with pens, ink, reports and notepaper. He had written to his wife; Maurice's eye took in like lightning the flat envelope. Probably only half a sheet within it, and the mail train had passed an hour ago.

"Anything happened?" asked Maurice. "Ouch!" Nick had followed him into his chair and sat down upon his middle.

"Not that I'm aware of," answered the other. "I prefer my job to yours on the whole." Jameson was stiff. He had ridden Maurice's pony along the canal banks for eight hours that day and at intervals felt himself tenderly in reminiscence. His "job" was routine office-work. "Don't you get sick of 'faddl'-ing (hobnobbing) with natives?"

"I get sick of their food, but *they* are always amusing," returned Maurice yawning. He passed a hand over his face and got up, heaving Nick to the floor. He had a headache and after a glass of soda-water—

"Spirits balash (No alcohol wanted)?" was Jameson's comment with a cocked eyebrow.

"No alcohol in hot weather, thanks!" said Maurice, and went to his cabin with Nick behind him like a little white ghost.

Thirty seconds later Jameson heard his own name ring through the deck beneath his feet and he went below to find his colleague with folded arms regarding a richly-wrought praying-mat that lay on his cabin floor. Gem-like colours glowed in the silk nap, which shone like satin as it caught the light from the single glass-guarded candle.

"I thought you told me nothing had happened to-day?" demanded Maurice with a very definite expression stamped upon his mobile face.

What was wrong? asked Jameson. He did not go poking into other fellow's cabins and wouldn't have noticed the mat anyhow, beyond thinking what extravagant chaps some were for buying such things. It was worth twenty pounds if a shilling, but people did acquire Persian rugs sometimes. What was wrong?

"This is the first time I've seen it or heard of it," said Maurice quietly, without moving. He was thinking hard. Presently he clapped his hands to call the servant, so sharply that Jameson started. Even Nick growled with surprise. "You were out all day, weren't you? I wonder where Ahmed was?"—and when the man appeared Maurice asked him.

He stood square and looked at his master unblinking. The expression of his face was that of the Sphinx. He spoke the truth: since Jammison Moufettish would be out all day he had gone ashore and withdrawn the plank, which he had put in a safe place.

"How safe, I wonder?" remarked the aforesaid Moufettish.

Maurice thought the Persian mat was ample testimony on that point.

"Whence comes it?" he demanded curtly.

"Doth the Presence not know?" answered the man in asking another question.

Then what Maurice had suspected was correct. Ramzy had heard about his permit and took this mode of expressing his gratitude.

"Oh, yes!" corroborated Jameson. "Bilêl got a telegram about lunch-time, I forgot."

Maurice looked at him bitterly. What else had he forgotten? And he had said nothing had happened!

Meanwhile Ahmed stood by, silent, impassive and how observant none could say.

Maurice spoke to him now, measuredly.

"It is not regular to leave the dahabeah unguarded, as thou knowest. Thou receivest wages for staying upon this boat. Let it not come again that it is unwatched. As to the mat it is nothing of mine, and I know naught of it. In the café let it be known that a thing has been found upon this ship that belongeth to none upon it. Take the mat to the mudirieh (governor's office of the province) and let it there await its owner. I have done. Take it now hence."

Without a word Ahmed picked up the mat, which crumbled and folded about his hands like a live thing of iridescent velvet. He smoothed it with one light sweep of his deft fingers and held it up for a second while he gave Maurice a flash of lightning scrutiny and said—

"It is rare—this!"

But the tanned English face gave no clue to the thoughts that must be in his mind and no gleam of acquisitive desire rose in the dark eyes that turned from it to the man's own.

"Art thou a showman?" came the cool voice with a touch of contempt in it. "Remove!"

The man melted like a shadow through the door behind him into the black corridor that led to the main deck. The cabin was as a furnace from which all oxygen is exhausted. Maurice looked at Jameson as he began undressing. "Bilêl gets the news," he mused, "and Ramzy furnishes the frankincense! Humph!"

"Where did Ramzy get it from?" wondered Jameson. "It's a beauty. A fellah doesn't fling about things of that sort!"

"No, he doesn't!" Worn-out by a heavy day, Maurice allowed himself to snap, whereupon Jameson departed. The two men climbed into their mosquito-curtained beds on the poop without so much as a "Good night!" between them. Jameson slept steadily. Maurice listened to Nick snuffing after mice for some time, and reflected. Query—where *did* that mat come from? Maurice had not the vaguest regret about its fate. Also he was annoyed that such a usual attempt at ingratiation should give him uneasiness. Was he afraid—afraid of a couple of Gippies?

When he slept it was as the dead sleep.

CHAPTER III

MRS. and Miss Brayton met the Jamesons in the crush of a theatre that summer. All were in London for a short while ere separating for the seaside, Scotland or country visits, and the usual exclamations and explanations of coincidence took place in a backwater of the crowded gilded lobby.

"Where are you going?"

"I'm off for deerstalking," said Jameson, "tomorrow." Content spoke in his tone.

"Scotland is a hole!" declared Mrs. Jameson pouting. "I shall go to Ostend with my mother!"

"Go, my child, with my blessing!" he retorted.

Edith laughed. It was now July and he had come Home in May after an absence of nine months! But when his ruddy face had settled back into repose she saw a keen eagerness in its aquiline lines as his eyes rested upon his wife's aloof, fine-cut features that she had not seen there before. Mrs. Jameson was waiting for something to happen; meanwhile she was living the usual routine of days. Her head was turned away—she was listlessly watching the swimming crowd—and Edith saw the gleam in her husband's eyes as he looked at the well-turned dainty neck with its single chain of pearls, and the sloping shoulders, perhaps rather thin,

and the lustreless hair piled curl on curl, sparkling with combs.

"We are thinking of having supper somewhere," ventured Jameson in the pause after all had been said and explained.

His wife turned swiftly with a face alive with repugnance.

"No, I'd rather go home! I'd much rather go home!" she exclaimed.

"Come to the *Carlton* with us," said Mrs. Brayton decisively, and Mrs. Jameson smiled on meeting her grey eyes enlarged by the pince-nez she always wore.

"Yes, do come! The more the merrier," urged Edith in support of her mother.

Jameson looked at his wife, who was wavering, and all at once took the initiative.

"Thanks very much, Mrs. Brayton! Come, Lucy! You were saying it would be so dull to be alone. Now you needn't be! I'm going, anyway!" He liked the solid responsible aspect of Mrs. Brayton and the quiet calm of Edith, both women with the stamp and polish of the world upon them. They might steady Lucy's restless mood.

Once he took steps without consulting her, Lucy followed. She thanked him for placing her wrap around her, and their glance met without a clash, a memorable event in his estimation.

The *Carlton* supper-room was almost full when they arrived. All the world seemed seated at the little tables. Scent of flowers, glitter of jewels, rustle of silk and laughter rippled through the subdued light where nevertheless an undercurrent of sadness hung brooding

and swaying invisibly above the shaded lights clustered here and there like fruit to be gathered in the ebb and flow of the social world.

Edith faced Jameson whilst her mother sat opposite his wife, and they looked at one another across a bank of roses in the centre of their table.

"An evening like this is amusing once in a way!" remarked Mrs. Brayton. She leaned back and looked about her with evident satisfaction.

"Very!" agreed Mrs. Jameson. "I don't believe I could ever have too much of it! I love it!"

"Ah, the enthusiasms of youth!" sighed Mrs. Brayton smiling. "Now an old cripple like me must have warm weather and a dry climate! That's why we go to Egypt every winter!"

"Where will you go this season—Mena House or Helouan or Heliopolis?" asked Mrs. Jameson with an assumption of interest. Her ears were really bent on the converse of Edith and her husband, and presently all four were engaged on the same theme.

"Have you heard anything of Egyptian affairs lately?" Edith had begun. "How goes the ancient Nile?"

Jameson knew apparently almost as much as if he were still in the land of the Pharaohs. This year the river promised a tremendous flood, so any doubtful canal bank was being strengthened. Harvey was busy.

"You hear all this from him, I suppose?" said Edith. Lucy had finished her scallop-shell and sipped her champagne languidly, but the girl was aware without looking at her that she was listening with every nerve astrain.

Yes. Events had moved pretty rapidly in these two or three months since most of the men had been away. Natives show their hand more then, there is more scope for that sort of thing. What had happened was this: two fellows, district engineers, who were supposed to be above hanky-panky, had gone in for bakhsheesh; Maurice had brought it home to them, so much so that one was fined twenty pounds and the other degraded and transferred to another Circle. This came about through a small native farmer named Ramzy, whose permit to work his pump for irrigating his feddans of cotton had been delayed first till Maurice got wind of the matter and then still further delayed by the manœuvres of the said engineers even after they had received orders to give him his water. The order was lost, Ramzy could not produce it, etcetera, etcetera, until Maurice losing patience reported the whole episode in such wise that there was a departmental typhoon which would have blown both incriminated gentlemen out of the Government service altogether had they not been one the cousin and the other the nephew of pillars of the State.

A pause followed the completion of the recital, which had been exceedingly graphic as Jameson warmed to his subject.

"You say they thought they would be allowed to do this *because* they were the cousin and the nephew of pashas?" asked Edith, horrified.

They believed themselves exempt—yes—from regulations on that account. They thought that Maurice would be afraid to attack them owing to their influence. "And, mind you," added Jameson, "some men would!"

"Would you?" suddenly asked his wife, raising her eyes from her plate.

"No, Lucy, I wouldn't!" and his voice, though not raised, had a dangerous ring in it like vibrating steel. His determined chin was all at once very prominent and his clean-shaven mouth set in one tight line. "We let pass a lot, but not everything, Lucy!"

She glanced swiftly at him. Yes, his eyes, coldly blazing, were centred upon hers, and she knew he would arraign her for her insult sometime, though probably not to-night. He was one of those who bide their time. Till he was ready he kept his own counsel.

"What sort of person is a pasha?" asked Edith, reflective this time. What she had heard to-night was not much to her taste, but from Jameson's demeanour she gathered it was not unusual in his world, so she swallowed the pill without visible grimace and sought information.

Mrs. Brayton sat watching Lucy Jameson, who tore her roll to little pieces with never a glance for any one.

"They vary," answered Jameson, smiling a trifle sardonically. "Some are good fellows, but others screw the fellahin down to the last ounce."

"Are there many such?" she inquired.

More than were good for the government of the country, he returned. All the trouble there was rose from them and their financial deals.

"No trouble ever from their relatives?"

The trend of her inquiries was now made plain.

"You're very quick!" said Jameson with some admiration in his tone. Yes, he was afraid Maurice was in for a battle with powers of hidden might. "And

I hope he'll come out top," added he; "but they're very clever."

"Is there any doubt?" broke in his wife.

There was a pause while the waiter handed the Neapolitan ice. When he went away Jameson answered—

"You never can tell in Egypt. The fact of your being an Englishman militates against your getting fair play."

"Why should it?" challenged Edith.

"Don't know. If you're a butt for criticism, as we are, much of it is bound to stick!" He thought the subject done to death and wrenched the conversation into other channels.

As they moved out for coffee and liqueurs into the big dusky hall, with its shrubs that no draughts ever stirred, Edith seized her opportunity. Her mother and Lucy preceded her and Jameson down the thick carpeted steps. Under cover of the Hungarian band tuning up in the corner Edith said to him—

"Then he has made enemies?"

The dim light hid her expression from him in the general pallor of her face, but the tone was unmistakable. He realized that she was afraid for Maurice's sake and afraid of she knew not what. He carried it off lightly. "Every one is the Irrigation officer's enemy! They can't really do much! The good old days of arsenic and bow-strings are over!"

"Then how will they go to work?" she asked.

She knew by instinct apparently that they would go to work. He tried to laugh off that as a fancy of hers too, but she could not be shaken.

"How? Anonymously?" she persisted.

Jameson stiffened with a touch of departmental pride. No, whatever else happened, anonymous accusations found no hearing in *their* Service. That was one of her uncle's strong points, he was glad to say. Whatever suspicions he entertained of Sir Donald's weaknesses—and there were some—he was not going to give them away to Sir Donald's niece.

"No, Harvey's all right as long as he keeps well," he declared. "It is when you get seedy that things begin to look different and you might go wrong! That's where their chance comes in!"

"But they wouldn't know the moment to act?" she objected, reassured.

He agreed that the contingency was very remote. Besides, Harvey was a wary bird, not easily caught napping. There was nothing in the world to be anxious about!

"*I*'m not anxious!" she returned with a haughty little lift of her head. "I am not concerned in Mr. Harvey's affairs!" She looked not at him but at her mother and Mrs. Jameson, choosing a nook at the far end of a long strip of carpet. "And what a time we've stopped talking here!" she added, with pride in every line of face and figure.

True. They had paused at the top of the steps that led down into the lounge and a little crowd had collected behind them like driftwood at the edge of a weir.

As they moved down in silence Jameson realized that he had been clumsy. His perception of her difficulty and his offer of consolation had both been obvious, and Miss Brayton had no use for either.

"You looked as if you were busy with State secrets, up there," commented Mrs. Jameson when they arrived. "Anything of real importance?"

"Nothing whatever," was Edith's calm rejoinder as she accepted coffee and liqueur.

Mrs. Jameson took a cigarette from her husband. Edith refused out of deference to her mother's wishes, in public places at all events.

"A filthy habit!" remarked Mrs. Brayton, genially pointed. Edith then took one and they all laughed.

"George goes back in three weeks, you know," Lucy remarked to Mrs. Brayton, flourishing her cigarette with ostentatious smiling defiance. "I thought of going with him!"

"Too hot for you!" said her husband, turning from Edith for a moment. "You had better wait till October. I know you won't mind!"

"Why shouldn't I mind?" said she, suddenly inquisitive.

"Glad if you do!" came the retort with a grim smile. He explained that his wife did not bear heat at all well, so it was much better for her not to attempt going back with him in August. Cooler weather did not come on till well into the autumn.

"I've done without you for a goodish while, Lucy," he ended, "I think I can stand it a bit longer. But then—" and his yearning stood plain in his eyes for all the world to see—"then I want you!"

She took a last puff at her cigarette and put it out in the little tray on the wicker table at her elbow. It was time to go home. Some of the lights in the roof had already been switched off.

Both were silent in the taxi that whirled them back to their Kensington hotel. She was thinking that after all Maurice would come while she was still in England.

"George, I don't mind the heat!" she said at last. "I want to go with you!"

He continued smoking the cigar with which he had started. Not a word did he answer. She stole a look at his profile. It was imperturbable.

"Very sorry, my dear."

Tremulously she began—

"I don't believe you love me——"

And he, galvanized to life, fairly blazed upon her, his self-control cut from him by her words as by a knife. In the London night, punctuated and starred by the flashing lights of street-lamps and motors, he told her that a woman who spoke to her husband as she had done to him at supper forfeited her right to claim love. She did not know what love meant. "I believe you can't help it," he said. "I believe it isn't in you."

For one thing he admired her. At such an onslaught most women would have dissolved in tears, floods of them. Lucy was startled, he saw by the turn of her head, but she only looked at him out of wide, bright eyes, like a bird—without a sound from her parted lips. She caught her breath once, that was all.

Then she gazed past him at the diamond scintillations in Harrod's plate glass windows, now like deep dark mirrors in their curved carved frames. Fascinated, she counted the panes in each window—three, four, seven—three, four, seven—before she answered. It would be a momentous reply, she knew, and far-reaching, but whether for weal or for woe she could not tell.

"No, I don't believe it is in me!" and as she spoke her heart leapt as she thought of Maurice, and she knew she had spoken a lie. From that she recoiled and said: "I don't want to stay in England, do you hear?" speaking louder as if he were deaf.

The taxi swerved across the road to the door of their hotel and Lucy swayed with the motion against her husband. He thrilled to the touch—she felt him—but gave no sign as he got out and ceremoniously held open the door for her.

"I hear," he coolly took up again as they went up the porch steps. "Stay at Ostend then."

She paused as he pushed open the glass swing door and looked up and down the quiet street. A chill little wind wandered through the grey pillars and greyer porches that stretched in an endless monotony into the murky distance.

"I won't have you in Egypt in the hot weather," he went on. "If you have forgotten what happened there in the hot weather two years ago, I haven't! Come in. You'll catch cold!"

She picked up the white satin fish-tail of her gown which she had let drop on the doormat and entered.

"I've not forgotten!" she replied. "Do you think I ever could?" Scorn filled her low voice. She had stayed out that year for the sake of her baby, and when she had lost him learnt to her anguish that had she gone Home out of the heat he would very likely have been saved.

"Coming upstairs?" she asked from the first landing.

He looked up at her where she stood, with her eyes shining in the light from the electric chandelier.

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Her white veil framed her face as if Greuze himself had posed her. His wife, yet she was as indifferent to him as a stranger.

Both knew it and neither knew why.

"No," he returned, feeling in all his pockets for matches. "Good night!" and he turned on the switch in the dark smoking-room and went in. Ardently he longed to rush up the stairs after her and seize his own, but the stakes he was playing for allowed of no false step. Lucy was wavering away from him now. Did he strike she would certainly hate him and might flee altogether. Save by love he could not win her—ever.

CHAPTER IV

KARLSBAD claimed Mrs. Brayton that summer. Being in a valley which steamed when the thermometer recorded any respectable degree of heat, that popular resort took some slight, if scarcely beneficial, effect upon Edith. Of course no one knew how much worse Mrs. Brayton might have been had she not gone there for the three weeks' cure. As it was they returned to England somewhat paler than when they had set forth and settled for their "after-cure" in the Cornwall home of the Bonners, on a month's invitation. Bonner had just come from Cairo, and with him he brought Harvey, whom Jameson had replaced. Very languid was Maurice, which was why the Chief had brought him here to swim every day in the sapphire Atlantic and recoup. It seems he had done a little too much swimming in the Nile and a good deal too much work, so had wound up with fever that laid him low for several weeks. He was all but carried on to the ship at Port Said.

"Tales out of school, sir!" remarked Maurice at last, turning in his deck-chair to smile at the little group on the lawn that sloped down to the red earth cliff at the end of the garden.

"Looks romantic, doesn't he, Edith?" laughed her uncle.

Edith agreed, smiling up from her embroidery, and Maurice covered his face in mock bashfulness. Indeed she liked his looks, with the breeze ruffling the parting in his dark hair and his eyes, so keen and steady, puckered against the tempered rays of a civilized sun. There were now heavier lines than she remembered around his mouth, but those were only lines of ill-health. They would wear off, now respite had come. The gloom that had possessed him when she last saw him was gone, and Edith rejoiced.

He told, lazily and humorously, the tale of the mat. When Ramzy heard of its rejection he was thrown into great tribulation and asked advice of all his friends. What they said came to this: "One mat could not be enough. There must be three." So when Maurice came back to the dahabeah one night he found three spread on the deck and Ramzy genuflexing among them. Fiercely Maurice addressed first Ahmed for letting him on board and secondly the man himself for daring to pester him further. "The wheat thanks you not for your care—it grows by God's will, an you interfere not too much!" he cried. "Why therefore thank me for that which I am here to do? Take and be grateful to the Hakouma (Government) and pay your taxes in due time!" Ramzy withdrew, hurt and puzzled, and still doubtful of Maurice's intentions.

"Alas! I am a poor man and already mortgaged for the worth of the sigada (praying-mats)," Maurice heard him explaining to his companions on the bank, "and I must go to the money-lender for wherewithal to buy new seed, as my crops are as straw and dust! Alas, that I have also failed to please the Moufettish! He

refuseth to take any gift of whatever proportion from me! Ahi, ahi!"

Maurice, irritable through over-heat and over-work, went out to the gangway plank and hurled it as he would have done at a pack of dogs baying the moon.

"I am *not* displeased!" he shouted. "But if ye chatter thus further when I wish to sleep I shall surely come forth with a kurbash (whip) in each hand! Hence, gabblers!"

This he gave in the vernacular and Bonner, almost inarticulate with mirth, translated for the benefit of a Cornish country house.

But, he continued, to cap the incident the plank did actually hit Ramzy, who thought the aim was intentional and rent the air with his apologies anew.

"His? I should have thought he'd want yours!" said one of the other guests, a young painter fresh from the Slade School, gathering hints for his future enforced sojourn in the land of sun and dust—a newly discovered consumptive.

Natives never ask apologies or explanations from whites. They go away and think over what could possibly be meant, arrive at extraordinary conclusions and act accordingly. This Maurice explained. Then he finished his tale: he demanded the plank back and threatened to send his white dog across it at them unless they dispersed. With that they withdrew, for natives detest European dogs, who nip their bare ankles. Before Ramzy had determined on his next move Maurice succumbed to fever and came away on leave. Jameson would have small sympathy for Ramzy.

"Mind you don't have too much!" warned Bonner.

"I'm watching out!" answered Maurice, and conversation drifted away to politics, while wonderful clouds dyed scarlet and gold swept across the opal sky and the sun went down behind the blazing seas.

The other chairs emptied one by one, but Maurice sat on and so did Edith, her work untouched on her crossed knee. His thoughts were on things that were written clear on his face. Edith watched him as well as the sunset. Depression was gone, but sadness remained. Not a vestige did he show now of the vivacity that had rocked his hearers with mirth over the recital of Ramzy's doings.

"What of your district engineer?" she ventured at length. "And isn't it a little cold for an invalid to be out of doors so late?"

He rose at once. Yes, she was right. He would go in. Would she not come in too if she were not otherwise engaged? His district engineer—oh, well!

She came and they settled in the comfortable morning-room, where a wood fire was burning. Maurice went close to it, even sat on the high fender.

"Oh, dear me!" said Edith in distress. "Are you chilled?"

He laughed, but shivered at the same time, so she demanded to know where his overcoat was, in order to bring it for him.

"The idea!" he cried. "I'm not going to have a lady fetch and carry for me!" and he went himself. It was a thick coat and in it he looked diminutive, though he was five foot six in reality. "That's better!" said he, wriggling deep into an enormous cosy chair. He did not mention that upstairs he had taken a powerful dose of quinine.

They talked of the Nile flood, which was coming strongly, and of district engineers in general and Mahmud Bilêl in particular. The new assistant engineer, Bilêl's subordinate, was not an Anglo-phobe like the other, but was a decent fellow as far as Maurice could judge. He was just back from a two years' training in England.

"Will they ever be able to govern themselves?" asked Edith.

"No," said he decisively. Their religion, that of *laisser aller*, militated against it as well as their climate.

"Climate?" she questioned.

Yes, he insisted. Climate! It took something out of you year by year that nothing put back and any undertaking in the end came to be distasteful. You thought twice about making the effort to begin doing anything. Himself he sometimes felt that strongly, after even ten years in the country, and Northern races possess most of the energy there is in the world. He had even seen Bonner fairly flog himself to work, and he was the tireless man of the Service. If after one short term in the country men felt thus, what wonder was it that Egyptians themselves should suffer from the sapping centuries that drew the life-blood of initiative from them?

"I've bored you, I'm afraid!" he said, breaking the silence that fell after his dissertation.

"Never be afraid of that, Mr. Harvey!" she returned quietly. "Some of the most interesting things in this world are left hidden for ever because somebody is afraid of boring some one else by talking about them!"

That was true, he admitted. "I can discuss things with you," he went on, "that I'd never dream of imposing on other women."

And she knew he was thinking of Lucy Jameson. Would it be kind to tell him that she was due here for a week on the morrow? While Edith was wondering, the matter was taken out of her hands by her uncle, who clumped in from a tramp over the heather with the artist-boy.

At first in the twilit room he thought Edith was alone with the glowing firelight. Outside the mullioned windows with their diamond-leaded panes the dusk shone like a sheet of luminous blue-grey steel.

"Hallo, Edith!" said he. "Sitting in harmonious meditation! Glorious evening, just cold enough! I hope to-morrow'll be as good! Rather cheerless for Mrs. Jameson to arrive in the rain, hey?"

Edith felt, though she did not see, the stir in the shadow of the big Chesterfield chair by the winking brass fender. The high back entirely hid Maurice from his host, but when he rose the revelation was complete—the light from the window fell hard upon his white face and fevered brilliant eyes. With one hand on his chair he steadied himself by force of will and Edith, who had also risen at sight of his effort, wished vehemently that she had prepared him. The shock of this innocent piece of news was evidently severe, but mercifully his obvious physical state was cloak enough for any eccentricity.

Bonner took in the situation in a second. "Hallo, hallo! Ulster on in a room like this! 'Fraid we haven't strained the fever off you yet, Harvey! This means bed—come along!"

Maurice resisted his friendly hand. There was really nothing at all the matter, and he must go back to London to-morrow morning. So why go to bed now?

Ridiculous! Go to London—to-morrow? Absurd! He was only just come—if his people wanted him they may wait! "Why, man, if it comes to that, you can't do it! You're too weak! Well, if you don't believe me, put some logs on that fire and we'll see!"

Maurice, on his mettle, at once undertook the task, and the other two stood watching him, Bonner mocking, Edith pitiful. The old-fashioned stone hearth was wide and deep, lined with burnt tiles, behind the high fender, and the logs were big and heavy. True, Maurice could just lift one log from the wrought-iron basket and, his face flushed and working with the effort, push it over the top of the fender into the blaze. That done he fell back gasping into his chair and lay quiet.

Into the stillness of the room vibrated Bonner's laugh, penetrating and low. "That's the man, my dear niece, who is going to London to-morrow!" He put aside his bantering manner. No one could be more purposeful than Bonner when he chose. He chose now. "Harvey, if you don't come with me up to your room and go to bed at once I'll carry you there! I'll have no tomfoolery in my house!"

"I *must* go to-morrow morning!" insisted Maurice, recuperating, but with every nerve a-quiver. If *she* was coming he had no choice but to go. He must—it was necessary.

"Why?" said Bonner. A direct question is in itself an unavoidable statement of one fact if it does not contain the germs of others. This question plainly marked its speaker's intentions. There had been no telegram for Maurice and Bonner had met the postman on his only visit that day and there was no letter for anybody

either. "So that excuse is no good, Harvey! Now I come to think of it, why do you want to go? You were keen to come! I don't understand you!"

He sat on the fender, his gaze bent on the puzzle before him. The firelight played upon Maurice's face, and turn as he might he could not avoid its illumination.

"I—I have some business!" he invented.

Bonner remembered he had said he was entirely free.

"You are wearing out Mr. Harvey, uncle!" warned Edith, and Maurice could not keep back a swift grateful glance up at her, dangerous as it was with those eagle eyes facing him. "Have mercy, uncle! Let him go if he wants!"

"I—I *must* go!" contributed Maurice.

Bonner looked from one to the other. They were leagued, in whatever it was, together. Why plead for mercy if there was nothing to hide? However, he knew the fever signs upon Harvey well enough. That young man would never go away to-morrow!

"Oh, well," said he easily, "let the subject drop," and went in search of his wife to confer with her over fever-diet.

"I meant to have told you myself," murmured Edith when they were alone. She did not notice how intimate a suggestion her speech bore till she had spoken. Then at his silence she bit her lip. Maurice had certain impenetrable reserves near which it was futile to wander. You skated and fell on slabs of unresponsiveness.

He rose without a word and walked slowly out of the room, and she heard him go upstairs very slowly indeed.

To her cheerily bustled in the artist-boy, spent with inspiration and achievement but supremely happy,

having been out all the afternoon engaged on a glorious struggle to reduce the blaze of a heather-covered hillside touched by the sun to the exigencies of a canvas two feet by one and a half.

"Any success?" laughed Edith.

He bridled. She needn't mock! Success is always possible, and he really had hopes of the Academy this year! If he got one in would she redeem her years'-old promise and marry him on the prospect of a garret and posing for him for ever and a day?

The chance was now not so remote as it had once been that he would make something of a career, so she felt bound to refuse, she said laughing. She could not consent to be a millstone around any one's neck! Besides, she was older than he. "Shall I say by how much?" she teased, and whispered with portentously round eyes: "Four years! I'm twenty-seven!"

He declared that no women kept promises, and departed in disgust to dress for dinner.

When they assembled in the drawing-room before the evening ceremony Maurice was noticeable for his absence, and young Sims-Evans, the artist-boy, volunteered to see what he was doing. He raced up the wide stairs and soon in the drawing-room they heard his voice calling from the landing that Harvey was all right. He pattered down again and Maurice followed, apologizing for his unpunctuality. His face was white and his eyes brilliant. He ate nothing and hesitated once at a whisky and soda, then took it.

"Your hot milk is coming!" called good-natured Lady Bonner from her end of the table. "Roy, take away that useless drink!"

The lad did so, warily, but the victim smiled without rancour. He swallowed his milk unprotesting when it came, and if he did not add materially to the gaiety in general, at least he avoided showing by word or deed how very unwell he felt.

"You going in the morning?" asked the artist-lad, sipping his stolen whisky and soda. "I saw all your things were packed."

"Can't inflict an illness on one's friends!" answered Maurice as lightly as he could.

"I think better than on strangers!" said Edith suddenly and quickly. It was her first expression of clear-cut opinion and it rang in the wainscoted dining-room like a challenge.

He at whom it was aimed said nothing, but looked quietly at the stocked and bewigged ancestor portraits that hung in their old-gold frames round the walls. That night he knew he could not get off, for there was no train. A joy that was almost pain, so sharp was it, filled him because he expected that he would not be able to go on the morrow and then *she* would have come.

By ten o'clock he was throbbing from head to foot and his head swam to such a degree he could barely steer his way out of the drawing-room to the stairs, where he made for the banisters as a wrecked mariner clutches a gunwale.

"Hold on a bit tighter, can't you, Harvey!" sounded Bonner's sardonic voice very far away, and he felt himself lifted to safety and borne along by an arm strong as a resistless wave. "This settles it!"

Maurice's sight cleared as he lay on his bed, while Bonner officiated as valet. A thermometer told tales

about a temperature of 103°, and his host's advice to lie still Maurice regarded as superfluous. He wished now to do nothing else. When Bonner turned out the light on his departure Maurice lay staring at the indigo squares of the window panes till a dream-troubled sleep overtook him.

Downstairs there were a few inquiries, but, as is the way of households linked with the East, no perturbation.

"I'll take a look at him to say good night," observed Lady Bonner, and general conversation, which had scarcely paused, continued its even flow. The Bonners very seldom had cards in the evenings. They chose their friends with care and talked with them.

Edith was very thoughtful all the evening. She had, after the first inquiries, said no word of Maurice; only she abstained from the piano, which for her was not usual. She was an admirable musician and after dinner was her favourite hour for Schumann, Chopin or Beethoven. To-night she opened a novel, of which her uncle alone noticed she never turned a page, but eventually she succumbed to the arguments of Roy Sims-Evans in favour of a rather chilly stroll by starlight in the garden.

This gave Bonner his chance. To his wife and sister he lost no time in pointing out one or two things about his niece: her extreme taciturnity this evening, her support of Maurice in his unreasonable desire to get away and her appeal to himself for mercy on the young man's behalf.

"I believe, Margaret," said he deliberately, "she is thinking of him."

Her mother looked up. She had not observed as much, and said so drily. Lady Bonner had stopped her crochet-

ing at her husband's first word and listened judicially.

"They have some understanding that I don't follow," he persisted. "I saw that in Egypt and I see it clearer to-day. But if she likes him, why does she not mind his wanting to get away?"

"Very simple!" declared Mrs. Brayton, her grey head of lovely hair upraised, hair that Edith brushed for her twice a day, since she utterly declined a maid. Life was very simple for Mrs. Brayton and her views were etched upon her face. Fifty-five years had not told her of temptation and strife and struggle. "Edith doesn't think of any man!"

He thought of her shadowed brooding eyes as he had seen them just now bent upon the novel she did not read. She might not be thinking of any man alone. In that abstraction there was much more involved than Mere Man, or his vision was defective.. Not for nothing had he spent thirty years in the subtle East.

"She isn't a chicken, Margaret dear," his placid wife was saying when he roused himself again. "A girl of twenty-seven should and does think about men!"

Her sister-in-law smiled. "Oh, yes, day-dreams! She will marry some time, I suppose, but meanwhile I am here!"

"And likely to remain, Margaret, I think," remarked her brother with dryness equal to her own. How self-centred some of us grow! He had not been blessed with children, but thank God he still had sympathy for others!

His wife was one of those women who wore a night-cap, perhaps because her hair, unlike her sister-in-law's, was

rather thin. As she tied the strings that night she said—

"Seriously, Donald, do you mean Edith is in love with him?"

He turned back the blankets before he replied. Then—

"Well, I don't say that. With a girl as reserved as Edith you never can tell how deep such a thing goes. Anyhow, whatever she is thinking of him, he is engaged with something else! I'd like to know just what!"

CHAPTER V

THE next day was one of those for which Cornwall is famous, cold in the shade, hot in the sun, with a dry breeze that threw over the azure sea a cloak of sparkling stars as it came. But Maurice was barred its allurements. He was unable to raise head from pillow, shivering with heat and cold alternately. The desperate effort he had made to pack up his belongings had hastened his collapse, but he now resented excitedly any interference with them. So they were left alone.

Next, he did not wish to be nursed by any one in the house, he told Edith, neither Sir Donald, Lady Bonner, herself nor any one else (Mrs. Jameson unsaid). Nursing was an unpleasant job.

"Not to me," said Edith quietly. She had knocked at his door, announcing herself, to bring him his early tea. Gladly would she do what she could.

He would not hear of it. No! Could not a nurse be sent for? He knew these attacks, they lasted only three or four days.

"Certainly," answered Edith, pouring him his cup of tea (which she had previously directed to be made with milk instead of water), as if their present interview in his room with a closed door at half-past seven in the morning was an every-day incident. "Anything else you want done?"

Yes, there was. To take away the clock—he had no desire to know the time—and to allow no one into his room on any pretext whatever. "I'm not a pretty object," he said, "at the best of times, and just now," passing a hand over his rumpled hair, "I'm even less attractive than usual! I've had one bad night and some more are coming. Miss Brayton, I—generally get delirious for a while. I—I don't want any one to—to come in when I'm that way! Do you understand? I can't have any one coming in! You must tell the nurse to hold her tongue if I say anything. You're the only person I can speak to like this and I must have it done!"

She understood, perfectly. He wished not to be bothered and to be entirely alone until he was presentable again.

"That's it!" he whispered, slipping back. In his anxiety to gain his point he had struggled up on one elbow and the effort turned him dizzy.

Edith, her calm poise undisturbed by the ache in her heart at this exhibition of combined weakness and strength, threw the windows wider so that he could see the ocean a-sparkle and the flashes of white as the gulls swooped and screamed in the sunlight above the cove where the smacks had just come in.

"I can trust you, Miss Brayton!" and he showed her the glimmer of his gentle friendly smile. "You understand so well!"

"Do I?" and the bitterness in her soul welled up into her voice, but swiftly she repressed it and took up the tray to divert his attention. "Is that all I can do?" and she opened the door to go.

There was something else, but he hesitated for long before saying it. It was that he would rather she did not come either after the nurse had arrived.

Edith agreed imperturbably, but he must put up with her until probably the afternoon train, for it was unlikely one could come before then.

"That comes in at five, doesn't it?" he inquired. "And the morning train at eleven?"

She nodded, well aware why he asked. He was wondering by which train Lucy Jameson was coming.

"Well, if I were you I'd turn over and go to sleep," she advised lightly, and went towards the mantelpiece.

He watched her. She took down the clock and added it to the jumble on her tray.

"I thought you might forget that!" he smiled.

"Do you want it back? Better not. It would only worry you. I shall take it, no matter what you say."

"What a tyrant! I was going to remind you of it, that was all."

"I never forget anything, Mr. Harvey!"

Then she went, and perfect stillness invaded the room. The shrieks of the gulls half a mile away Maurice could clearly hear, and presently a scent of clover found its way to him from the fields beyond the garden. The gulls' cries melted into a steady drowsy hum, then ceased altogether and he slept.

He had not heard voices as Edith closed his door behind her. Coming out she met her uncle on his way downstairs for his matutinal ramble round his domain with the dogs. He had wished to go in and see Maurice. Edith interposed quietly but firmly.

"I promised him that from this out," she said, "no

one should go in to him. He seemed very troubled about it, so I'm going to see no one does."

Bonner rubbed his grey hair thoughtfully, regarding his niece the while. She was cool, pale (she was not a coloury girl) and fresh as usual in her white linen frock, but there was a certain glint in her hazel eyes that gave him pause. With another woman he would have paid no attention and walked into the room had he wished. This Edith knew. Therefore she stood with her back to the door with the tray still in her hands.

"Nonsense!" said Bonner. "What were you yourself doing in his room then?"

And Edith told him that she had gone uninvited, and looked him full in the face on that declaration.

Bonner took the tray from her, and walked down the stairs without a word. Edith, after noiselessly opening the door, took the key from the inside and her uncle, glancing back at a metallic click he heard, saw her put the key into the white suede bag slung upon her arm. Then she followed him down into the dining-room, where breakfast was already laid and spirit-lamps burned beneath chafing-dishes whence rose appetizing odours.

There he shut the door and turned on her.

"Now, Edith, what does this mean?" said he. "What secret understanding have you arrived at with Harvey?"

She had taken possession of the coffee. "Milk and sugar—two or one?" and he saw her hand as she held the long-spouted silver pot was as steady as a machine, not a tremor about it. "There's no secret," she answered, handing him his cup. "Mr. Harvey likes me, that's all, and I went to see him out of friendliness."

"And out of friendliness, I suppose, locked him into his room so that no one can get to him!"

"Yes. He wants to be alone. So should I under similar circumstances." She helped herself from a dish. Bonner, convinced she was lying, could not but admire her coolness.

"Doesn't he expect you to go back to him?"

"No, he told me not to."

"You obey him in all things?"

She looked up with an expression of amused tolerance. "Why not? Surely he has a right to as much comfort as he can get!"

"No secret!" he threw back, meditating. "Why—if there was no secret—did you ask mercy for him when I was questioning him last night?"

"When you knew he was reeling with fever I thought it very inconsiderate of you, uncle."

She was impregnable. He gave up the assault and looked up the numbers of available doctors and nurses in the telephone book.

By the five o'clock train came both Mrs. Jameson and the nurse. A mouth like a slit without lips was the nurse's chief feature, and she had taken Lucy's measure in the omnibus that rumbled them home from the station.

"Oh, is some one ill—Mrs. Brayton?" wondered Lucy, marvellously wrapped in floating veils and a dust-coat. She knew the party she was to meet.

Miss Ridley was not inclined to make any revelations, so Lucy knew nothing of Maurice's relapse till she was at tea on the terrace in the shade thrown by the house. Miss Ridley had gone straight to her patient after a

rapid low-toned conversation with Edith, who handed over to her the key of Maurice's room.

"I see—no one is wanted there, *no one*," said the business-like little lady, and mounted the stairs briskly. Her course, at present but outlined, would not be all plain sailing, she foresaw. Well, she had dealt with human nature and intricacies before.

Maurice was lying watching the door when she went in, and his face cleared at sight of her.

"Ah!" he said with a shy look, "good morning, nurse!"

It was not morning, she told him, but evening. Had he been asleep much?

He must have! He had not thought the time had gone so soon. Two or three times—or more; he did not know how many—Miss Brayton had roused him for quinine or hot milk. No, he wanted nothing, except to get away on pressing business.

"Oh, well, that'll have to wait a little while!" she retorted cheerily.

After tea Lucy went with Lady Bonner and Edith to cut carnations for the house. There was to be a dinner-party that evening and afterwards would have been a surprise dance, had illness not come into the house. But it is difficult to put off twenty guests, so the dinner would stand.

"Oh, yes!" prattled Lucy, as she picked among the beds. "The dance would never do with poor Maurice out of it! The music would drive him mad!"

"So I thought," responded Lady Bonner, looking at her gently. Lucy somehow felt reproved, and her high voice with its penetrating sweetness was still for a minute.

But mischief was done. Nurse Ridley, crocheting lace by the window farthest from her patient, saw him start awake as if struck and lie wide-eyed and eager-faced. Professionally she resented any unrehearsed cause and effect where a patient was concerned, so she stood up at the window, showing herself. If that did not suffice she would speak. They were bending over the flowers to snip and gather and did not see her. How odd it was that Lucy's smallest exclamation rang clear whereas not a murmur of the other two voices could be heard though all were talking together.

"You are disturbing my patient!" she called. "Aren't there any other flowers round the corner?"

"Oh, don't drive them away!" pleaded Maurice. "I want to hear about that dance—I hadn't known of it! Mrs. Jameson must have it if she wants it! She seems to, badly!"

"And what will you do? I thought you told me you had a headache!"

So he had. But it did not matter if any one wanted a dance. He could bear it, as he had borne other things.

"Well, you are a caution!" she announced.

"Tell them if they want that dance to have it! I hate to feel I'm spoiling their pleasure!" He spoke with such energy that she looked him over. Yes, the evening rise of temperature had set in. By nightfall he was rambling in delirium, but roused every now and again to ask if the dance was beginning. When the music downstairs really commenced, as he had irresistibly willed it should, and beat like a faint rhythmic pulse, Nurse Ridley understood why he wished no one he knew to be with him just now. Time and time again he

asked a Lucy for a dance. "Just one? No, I knew you wouldn't, but Jameson won't be angry for only one, will he? Safest not? You were always safe! I've done nothing to offend you, tell me! Oh, he doesn't suspect, does he? I've given my world to you, Lucy! Give me this one waltz!"

Once thinking he was too much excited, his guardian started for the door with the intention of stopping the dance downstairs, but the strange double knowledge of delirium told him what she meant to do and he got out of bed before she could get to him and stood up to follow her, saying—

"No, no, not that! You mustn't!"

Then he had reeled back on the bed. It was at this point that Lady Bonner came up to ask how he was. Nurse Ridley, though sorely tempted, stood by him loyally and gave away nothing of his privacy.

She noticed Lady Bonner had not the face of a happy hostess. She looked a queen in her black and grey lace draperies with her tiara flashing above her brow, but a worried queen.

"I suppose they are enjoying themselves very much?" suggested Nurse Ridley.

"Y—yes, oh yes!" and then came an invitation to go and look. She, Lady Bonner, would stay with Maurice for a few minutes. But the nurse smiled. She would not leave her patient, though he was quiet now. He was sleeping, she saw with a backward glance, so she allowed his motherly hostess to come in for a moment to look at him. He lay like a tired child, arms above his head.

"Dear boy!" she murmured on her way out. "He

looks very worn. It is just as well he is here, perhaps. Downstairs is a man he wouldn't care to meet."

In truth she was troubled that night and it took all her tact to manage smoothly the situation that had arisen. Her neighbour-hostess who brought her house-party had said in her acceptance of the invitation that with her at that time would be a man who "knew them all in Cairo" very well. Lady Bonner wondered who this could be. Not a man of their Department, said her husband. He ticked off the whereabouts of every member.

It was Mahmud Bilêl, who at Oxford had shared rooms with one of the Tregarthen boys. He entered with the others, jaunty and self-possessed, in faultless evening dress, shook hands all round and smiled at Bonner.

"You need no introduction, I know!" said Mrs. Tregarthen to her hostess. "Mr. Bilêl tells me you have all been so kind to him! Some people out there, he says, refuse to receive 'natives,' as they disdainfully call them. But you, he says, are above prejudice, dear Lady Bonner! He is a delightful fellow—such a quaint way of looking at life!—and of such an important family! Don't you think so?"

"Oh, certainly!" said Lady Bonner drily, in a manner that caused her guest to speculate upon the inconsistency of the Briton at home and abroad—at home so stiff and abroad so—well, enlightened. Mrs. Tregarthen took a great interest in Missions, big and little. She believed in practice, not theory, and set an example whenever opportunity opened a path before her.

Bilêl was inclined to offer a hand both to Edith and Mrs. Jameson, but neither seemed to see it. Each contented herself with a slight bow and then turned away.

"Hello, Bilêl!" was Bonner's greeting with a steady glance into the dark onyx eyes. "When did you get leave and for how long?" He knew the answer before it came, but wished to hear how far covert insolence could be carried. When Bilêl was fined for his share in the Ramzy scandal he had been deprived of leave for the current year also, as part punishment. Yet here he was—he a district engineer on £12 a month with a family—pretending equal terms, and could not be spurned without a scene that was unthinkable in the circumstances.

"Oh, it wasn't necessary for me to stay in the end!" he returned easily, his eyes on the ladies meanwhile. "I have two months' leave. As much as inspectors!"

"Granted to you, I suppose? How can you afford to come to England?" asked Bonner, suave as if—or so it seemed—discussing the weather.

Bilêl smiled into his face. "Ahmed Bilêl Pasha made me a delightful present, Sir Donald! Please present me to Miss Brayton! I saw her in Cairo last winter!" He spoke just a trifle louder, for Mrs. Tregarthen was sailing across the floor toward them. Bonner could not possibly verify any statement regarding such a "present," he knew. So did Bilêl.

The lady was upon them. "Are you never going to do your duty, Sir Donald?" archly. "You are keeping the young people from each other!"

The Chief of Egyptian Irrigation paid her not the faintest attention. In an affair like this there was no room for women. It was incredible that he should under any conditions be brought into contact with native clerks and engineers on a social footing, and he could

scarcely believe it now. He would sooner invite his grooms to table with him!

The lady was deeply offended. Bilêl, having created the embarrassment, moved gracefully off towards his goal—the ladies who had gathered about Lady Bonner—and left his host to his angry guest's tender mercies.

"You don't understand, Mrs. Tregarthen!" Bonner said to her sternly. "I would treat any native well *short* of taking him into my house to my—well, to ladies! That is if he were a man of good character, but this fellow is not, as I happen to know. His case came before me almost as I left the country."

She had the courage of ignorant convictions. "Then are you sure you have given time enough to consider?"

That was the last straw. She encountered the cold flash of eyes before which men quailed, even though they had done no wrong, and she was abashed. Never yet had that liberal-minded wife of an M.P. come across the unwritten Departmental law.

"I have!" and though he was furious he still crushed his voice to coolness. "As I'm afraid I can't lay before you the facts in their entirety, you must be content with my mere word. Doubtless it won't content you, but it is the best I can do! This fellow is not in any way fit for ladies' society. I speak for your own sake as well as for mine!"

Thoroughly roused and resolved to go home as soon as she could collect her party, she gave him as she thought a Parthian shot, playfully—

"Dear me, I *am* sorry to hear that! He is to be my son-in-law, you know, in the near future!"

It took not the effect she intended, but another. He

smiled drily and more dry, and she hated him for the amusement in his eyes. Better they should flash!

"Has he told you he has already a couple of wives and a litter of children by each?" he inquired composedly.

She was electrified and horror-stricken, but did her best not to show it. No, he certainly had not! It was not true! Was it really the case?

"Of course Koranic law allows him still one more besides your daughter. But there's our local talent tuning up, so as you said we mustn't stand in the young people's way," and he firmly drew her across the polished parquet floor that reflected the crystal-bugled lights as a sheet of ice might do. The village pianist and violinist, enshrined among greenery in a corner, had burst into melody and very soon the room was full of the swish and whirl of youth enjoying itself.

Bilêl had introduced himself to Edith, but she did not remember him at all and excused herself soon because she knew that evening her mother required letters to be written to catch the Indian mail. She shared to the full the Bonners' prejudice—in the eyes of Mrs. Tregarthen—against brown skins, and in truth with Maurice ill upstairs she felt no privation in retiring from the "light-hearted revels," as she called them to her aunt when bidding her good night.

"Edith is unhappy! The way your sister martyrizes her is ridiculous!" she told her husband after the girl had gone.

"Fiddle-de-dee! She went to avoid Bilêl!" he growled, sore from his wife's chastisement for hurting the feelings of Mrs. Tregarthen, whom she had to pacify. "Leila, never invite that woman again! Anyhow, I

don't think we'll see Miss Tregarthen as that chap's third wife! I've spiked *his* guns at any rate!"

The man knew Maurice was here. He had asked her his whereabouts and had smiled sweetly on hearing of the feverish attack. He thought, said Lady Bonner, that Maurice was avoiding him and the fever was a screen for fear.

Bonner swore under his breath, then laughed. "He might as soon think *I* am afraid of him!"

Nevertheless, he thought so, she remarked, as Mrs. Jameson passed by. Mrs. Jameson was ruffled and presently turned back to the terrace to speak with them. The light from the open windows fell on her face, flushed from dancing and sullen with resentment. Bilêl stood back in the shadow of the wall watching the three.

"Why can't I go up and see Maurice?" she demanded fretfully, her fine brows drawn. "It seems only by order of Miss Brayton!"

Bonner took up the cudgels. "No, Harvey is a person of great reserve, Mrs. Jameson. You know him so well you must know that!"

"That is true!" came softly from the shadow. No one seemed to hear.

"Well, he doesn't want to be seen when he thinks he isn't presentable. We've none of us seen him since last night. It's his own decree. So I'm afraid——" He paused, looked up at her through the dark and smiled with a gesture of finality.

She was quivering with—she believed—concealed irritation. "Good night!" said she abruptly, and passed on into the impromptu ball-room. Edith, she was convinced, had made up the tale to prevent her gaining

access to Maurice. She did not trust those level limpid eyes.

"Mayn't *I* see him?" came that voice from the shadow, with a mocking tinge in it.

"No! Didn't you hear what I said?" Bonner's voice had unconsciously taken on the official curtness.

"Yes, I heard, Sir Donald, but——"

"Well, Harvey is not on show!"

"No," and the voice from the shadows was carefully inexpressive, "no. I can understand that."

There was no response and, all said that he dared say, the district engineer withdrew, well pleased with himself. The Bonners were upset, he thought. He exaggerated his influence.

"You see?" said Lady Bonner. "What did I tell you?"

CHAPTER VI

THE first day that Maurice came out to a long chair in a garden arbour covered with clematis a cable announced to Mrs. Jameson that her husband was very ill with appendicitis. Edith was sitting just inside the arbour door on a rustic bench when the yellow envelope was brought.

Lucy read the message aloud, and foreboding fell upon her like a mist. After those few words she said nothing. Edith rose.

"Don't go," said Maurice.

"Too many earwigs where I am," she rejoined, and walked across the croquet lawn into the rockery that overhung the cliff.

Maurice, perturbed, saw the blue-veined hand that held the flimsy sheet sink gradually as Lucy stared unseeing after the girl's figure drifting away from them.

"I hoped for such a happy little holiday!" she sighed.

He did not sigh. Edith's departure had made him vaguely uneasy, but he shielded his feelings with a mask of silence. She mistook this for heartlessness. "I believe you are glad I have to go!" she said passionately.

"Glad!" and he smiled slowly. "Glad!" When he spoke her ear caught the note of sadness in his voice

that her eye had missed in his face. "Poor old Jameson!"

"Why do you say that?" she demanded quickly, suspiciously.

He glanced at the message open upon her knee. "Appendicitis!" he answered. "'Tisn't a pleasant thing! He's alone too. When are you going?"

She rose to her feet, letting message and envelope slither to the grass, and spread her arms out in a despairing gesture. "I suppose I must go!" but she did not look at him as she spoke.

"Who signed the cable—he or the doctor?" asked Maurice. She did not answer nor move, but stood with folded hands gazing out over the sea, so he reached down after the telegram and with an effort secured it.

"*Have appendicitis. Operation necessary to-day. McLeod will cable news,*" it ran. And it was signed "*George.*"

"He doesn't ask you to come," was Maurice's comment. He was quite aware of Jameson's outlook. A desperate desire for his wife warred with his knowledge that hot weather was not good for her. In his extremity he had cabled hoping she would come, and yet he would not ask her definitely to do so. The whole message was a cry to her, and it moved her not a whit.

She took the sheet again. It was sent from Cairo, from Gezira, doubtless from the Hospital, where she had lost her baby son and very nearly followed him herself.

"'To-day,'" she read. The message was timed at eight o'clock in Cairo, where the time is two hours ahead of Greenwich. She looked at her wrist-watch, which

pointed now to only half-past eleven. Operations in that country, she remembered, always took place in the morning. That upon George would be over by now.

Maurice, with his lower lip held hard in his teeth, watched her face and read her mind like an open book.

"The Brindisi mail leaves London to-morrow night," he said quietly. "You can do it easily, and get there on Wednesday. He'll still be in a lot of pain when you arrive."

She stood looking down at him as he lay. He had the trick of graceful attitudes, and with hands beneath his dark head and crossed ankles that were thin as a girl's he looked for all his thirty-four years not a day older than eighteen, save for the lines about his mouth and the set of his closed lips. His smile, it is true, was not that of adolescence.

"Do you think I ought to go?" she said slowly. "You wish to get rid of me?"

He made no answer nor stirred, only smiled, while his eyes narrowed and narrowed till they almost closed. Then his voice came—

"You are Jameson's wife."

It took a second to reach her consciousness, then she flung her arms to the skies as a woman does who is beyond herself.

"Mind!" he warned. "Some one may be looking!"

But she was wrought up and cared nothing. Was he for ever calculating the effect of every action on a possible audience? Did *he* never let himself go?

"No, Lucy, never as you are doing now. And if you don't care whether you give us away, I do! Suppose Bonner saw you just now! Control yourself!"

She sat down and gazed at him with sulky reproach. He had not moved and now just turned his head on his arm to look at her sideways. Full of her grievance against him she did not see that his face was white and strained with the effort to hear what she said through the roaring in his ears.

"I was looking forward to being so happy for a little while with you—such a little while! And now—oh, it is like him! It is like him! I can't go!"

He turned his head straight, closed his eyes and lay still, so still that as she looked the thought came into her mind that he would lie like this one day in death! The idea broke upon her with flashing horror and on the instant she had thrown herself forward on her knees and gathered him in her arms. "Oh, Maurice!" and she held him tight. "Don't you love me any more?"

"Lucy, let go! Are you mad?" he exclaimed roughly, disengaging himself. Never yet had they come so far as close personal contact, and he had hoped they never would. Ah, but it was sweet! It was almost painful, and as they stared at each other he longed to take her and feel her upon his breast again. "We agreed not to do that!" he said, wide-eyed, and then he all but swore aloud, for a shadow crossed them where they sat and Edith stood before them with a bunch of stocks in her hands. How much had she heard or seen?

She seemed to tower over them in her muslin gown with its gossamer lace. Her face was calm as the Venus de Milo.

"Aren't they a splendid colour?" and she held out the stocks, Bonner's own evolved species, a fine

double flower of such a magenta that it fairly blazed even on that grey day.

"Glorious!" agreed Maurice.

Lucy found no word to say, but bent her eyes upon the flowers as if fascinated. A bumble-bee came whirring and settled among them busily. She saw him working his way in and out from one to another.

She heard Maurice as in a dream speak of her husband, the operation, her immediate departure, and heard Edith's sincere-sounding regrets.

"Yes, very sudden!" she found herself murmuring when she felt some remark was expected of her.

Then Edith went on into the house, bumble-bee and all.

"I hate that girl!" whispered Lucy, her eyes on the tall receding figure. "She's far too quiet! How much does she know about us?"

Maurice was well aware that she knew all there was to know, but he did not say so. Lightly he responded: "Oh, it's the nature of some people to be quiet! They can't help it!" One thing he did not know: that Edith's friendly attitude to them was the finest effect of histrionic art. She had seen Lucy's outburst as she returned from the rockery and it was with the greatest effort that she brought herself to stop and speak a moment. Her impulse had been to pass by silent with averted face and detestation in her heart.

Maurice was certain that whatever she had seen was safe with her, but later in the day he winced to see Lucy go out of her way to insult the generous girl. The allowances that Edith was obviously making for strained nerves only added to her irritation, and eventually Lady Bonner reproved Lucy.

"Dear, even if you are very much worried about your poor husband," said she, "that is no reason to speak to a fellow-guest as if she were worse than a bad servant!"

"Oh, never mind, Aunt Leila!" said Edith easily. "It doesn't matter in the least!"

Maurice looked from one woman to the other, both so dainty and so refined, but it seemed to him that Lucy was positively ugly for the moment. Edith was so imperturbably dignified. As she glanced once swiftly at Maurice there was even the warmth of a smile in her eyes, but only in her eyes, not her face.

Lucy left by that night-mail, bewailed only by the artist-boy who, taken by the willowy lines of her charming figure, wished to paint her portrait. She had not been a comfortable guest, this time, was Lady Bonner's remark.

"Had the vapours, I expect!" drily seconded her husband.

"Is that young woman ever equable?" contributed Mrs. Brayton severely. "I couldn't stand such sky-rocketing in any companion of mine!"

Afterwards Maurice said to Edith in the hall on his way up to his room—

"I'm glad she's gone!"

There was a strange intensity in her response—

"Do you *mean* that?"

"She tried you rather, didn't she?"

"Oh, that's nothing!"

"I'm glad she *did* go."

And he could not, think as he would, find out why her face fell at his words. She might feel upset had Lucy not gone. It never occurred to him that his unwitting

emphasis on the one little word "did" had proved to her doubly—over and above what she had seen—his power over Lucy. To keep her out of his room while he was ill and now to send her away was a proof not only of his power but also hers. Were he not fighting hard against her influence he would not have had strength to do this, since he loved her. It was a drama in which Edith though involved was a spectator. Bound up with them in it she could neither get away, nor did she wish to throw herself into it. Hers was but the part to wait, watch and suffer, and offer a helping hand which might quite possibly be refused with contumely.

This year there was a high Nile, so Bonner was informed, and it was very inconvenient that Jameson had dropped out of his Circle, which was already undermanned. That meant that Corry from the Dam had to take his place, and Corry had not hit it off very well with the new district engineer, Rasul.

"Wonder why that is?" ruminated Bonner, his brows drawn. Corry had a ferocious temper.

"Rasul's a good chap," insisted Maurice, "only a bit new-fangled. Too clever for his job." Maurice had come to know Rasul very well in the long hot hours they had spent together in bungalows and tents. Rasul had explained to him with bitterness of soul how the ideas he had absorbed in the course of his English training were jeered at by the men in the provinces, who could not realize that his way was correcter than their own. It was all very well to work under and among white men, said Rasul, but impossible to keep up to the mark if all your yoke-fellows were lazy and corrupt.

"Ah! he called them corrupt, did he?" said Bonner.

No. But that was what it was. Since the Hakouma (Government) made such a public set against the custom of bakhsheesh Rasul said he would obey its mandate. His fellows regarded him as a blackleg.

"Rather funny story you're telling, Harvey!" commented the Chief grimly.

It was true, nevertheless. Maurice was sorry for the boy, so very much a fish out of water among his own compatriots, too!

"In this letter," Bonner tapped the sheet he held in his hand, "Corry tells me the man has been proved to have put down wrong records in his reports. How do you make that out?"

"He should have doctored his reports to make them tally, sir!" he replied, grim as his Chief, and their eyes met.

This Bonner could not allow. It was an attack on the whole Ministry, and whether the implication was true or not he could not have the policy of his administration criticized. Maurice had no fear, so a direct snub would be no use and would only rouse his temper. Already his glance was ominously steady.

"Live and let live, Harvey!" said Bonner, taking his subordinate's arm. "Hercules was very lucky to be allowed to clear out his Augean stables in peace. What we are busy at is the life-work of a Sisyphus! It's no use worrying! Come and have a game of billiards!"

"Has Rasul been dismissed?" asked Maurice, sticking to his point.

"No, he has only been fined and told not to do it again. I'll play you a hundred and give you twenty," pursued Bonner blandly.

The younger man took down a cue and elaborately chalked the end, and Bonner knew something was coming. It came—

"Ours is a charming Service—one chap gets fined for honesty and another is granted leave and a better post for open corruption!"

Sharply spoke the Chief—

"Harvey, don't talk like that!"

Maurice looked up with his gentle indifferent smile, then levelled his cue and played on. What need to speak further? Both men knew they were helpless, caught in the toils of the insuperable East, that conquers the West at every turn.

Just before the Braytons' departure for London, Lady Bonner received an epistle printed with silver lettering that stirred very mixed feelings in her motherly breast and moved her husband to callous mirth.

"Mrs. Tregarthen begs the pleasure of your company at the marriage of her daughter Olive to Mahmud Bilêl at St. Stephen's Church at 2.30 p.m. on September 15, and afterwards at her residence, the Grange. R.S.V.P.

The men gasped. What incredible folly!

"I was afraid, Donald," admonished his wife, "your speech the other night was too strong! You know she is like the Irish pig—the more you pull one way the more she goes the opposite!"

"But, good heavens!" he spluttered, "common sense——"

"Donald, at your age to expect common sense of such a person! Her daughter may acquire it by experience, but she—never!"

"They're cracked, the whole crew!" he cried. "She'll expect us next to have them to the house!"

His lady became thoughtful. She could not do that. Besides, what of the legal aspect of such a marriage? Unless Olive became a Mohammedan no English marriage ceremony was binding in Egypt, to such a man as Bilêl least of all. The very fact of his consenting to any rite in any Church showed what he was—neither good Mussulman nor flesh nor fowl. Even a registry office contract would be no bond for him. His relations and his two wives would regard Olive as—well, they would not regard her at all. For them she would be but a temporary adjunct and they would assuredly treat her accordingly.

"We cannot receive in our house a woman of such equivocal position," she finally set forth.

No one wished her to.

"It's no use talking, evidently," Bonner resigned himself, "so we'd better refuse and send them a present. Where's the Stores book and what shall it be?"

They were sitting in the drawing-room after dinner, the Braytons, the Bonners and Maurice. Roy Sims-Evans had gone that afternoon and been seen off by the whole party in the high spirits that youth invariably diffused around him. He had put his head out of the train window as the guard's flag went up to ask Edith again to marry him when he had made his fortune. Maurice had snubbed him in jest, telling him he was a chicken, and Edith had cheerfully repudiated both gentlemen.

"Oh, well, we'll see this winter!" he cried as the train moved. "I'm coming to Egypt somehow, you

know! Work my way as a steward on a tramp steamer, maybe! So long!"

The reaction from that high spirit was upon the cabal now, and though no allusion was made to it, in each of them was a sense of separation and looming change. They watched the leaping fire in the grate—early September evenings are cold in Cornwall—and the future of Miss Tregarthen stood portentous in their minds.

"I wonder if she knows what she is doing?" mused Edith. She looked up. "Well, Aunt Leila, if you can't see her I suppose I can! No social obligations lie upon tourists. We can do as we please!" She was surprised at the earnestness with which Maurice made a stand against her proposal.

He spoke strongly, begging her to have nothing to do with the unfortunate girl, however cruel such a course might seem. Interference would be worse than useless, and she might be dragged into an intolerable situation. Prevention was better than cure, he said, and to keep out of a hole was much easier than to get out of one!

Still Edith did not see what harm her visiting the poor girl would do.

"No, no!" Maurice appealed to Mrs. Brayton. "Promise me you won't let her! No good would come of it!"

"Of course not!" decidedly pronounced his ally. "She must fight her own way!"

Edith was unconvinced. What she had seen of Egyptian home life had not appealed to her taste and she was very sorry for any one full of ideals who was to be plunged into a country of merciless realism.

Lady Bonner said little, but to the most casual eye

she was much perplexed. "Couldn't you send for him and ask him seriously what his intentions are regarding Olive Tregarthen?"

"What business is it of mine?" parried Sir Donald, his finger in the index of the Stores catalogue. It was Mrs. Tregarthen's job. If she wished to throw one of her brood to the wolves who could stop her? Bilêl might be in his Department, but a native's domestic affairs are sacred ground.

There was nothing to be done, he declared, and Maurice backed him up.

CHAPTER VII

ROY SIMS-EVANS, though in manner and appearance as feather-brained a youth as ever was born, possessed a substratum of sound common sense. Inherently optimistic, the knowledge of his recently discovered malady took very slight effect upon his spirits and he at once had made up his mind to make the best of the situation. There was a chance he might recover. Travel offered charms and if he were "condemned to Egypt," as Maurice had put it, he foresaw opportunities for painting and enjoyment there. His father's old friend who defrayed his expenses had laughingly said there must be six canvases during the winter to satisfy him that Roy was not entirely idle. "The idea!" he fumed. "Idle! He won't ever take me seriously. I'm going to be R.A. some day, and President at that! You needn't laugh, Miss Brayton! I'll be 'on the line' sometime and then you'll go on your knees to me!"

On the steamer Roy recollected that a school-chum of his named Borrodaile had gone into the Egyptian Civil, and the day after arrival looked him up in the *Garrison Directory* and found his home was apparently the Turf Club, in a street with an impracticable name. So nothing daunted, Roy climbed into a brokendown victoria, which he discovered in Cairo did duty for a cab, drawn by a pair of skinny ponies who leaned together

across the pole as one cantered and the other trotted along the ill-paved road. He was at last deposited before the marble steps of an unimposing yellow and white building whence issued a person in black livery and stockings to wave off Roy's driver, who, taking his passenger for a tourist, saw fit to demand triple fare as loudly as he dared before that home of the Briton—a club.

Borrodaile was inside, just come from tennis, and was very glad to see him. "Oh, lungs! Hard luck! Mind you wrap up going home this evening! Got a coat with you? Oh, you invalids are all alike! I'll lend you one!" and he took Roy home to dine at the flat he shared with three other men. Of these Roy could only visualize Capper of the Police, who was Borrodaile's particular friend. One of the others was in a dressing-gown getting over a chill and the fourth, much to his regret, was in evening dress, having promised to go to a dance that night.

Capper expressed—for him—poignant displeasure at such a proceeding, as it spoiled their bridge four. Then he saw Roy's eye light up at mention of bridge. "Do you play?" asked he, and at the joyful affirmation he announced he forgave Brown, who at best was a vile player.

"Why on earth he goes out to a second-rate dance to-night," he commented after Brown's departure, "when there's Shepheard's Cotillon to-morrow, beats me!"

Borrodaile was impatient. "Can't you see he's spooning? But I'd hesitate in his place to make myself that beast Bilêl's brother-in-law, even if the lady was a Psyche!"

Roy Sims-Evans pricked up his ears.

Capper pulled in his chair at the dining-table, looking at the railway inspector the while. His was the sleepiest eye in Egypt and it took in the most. No one ever knew how much it did take in.

"That's the lie of the land?" remarked he. "Where's Mrs. Bilêl?"

"Harêm, of course!" This was Greek to Roy. "Mamma-in-law is displeased, because promises are broke! If he comes to the Cotillon to-morrow without Madame Bilêl there'll be wigs on the green! I think I'm going to see! He's pretty certain to!"

Roy interrupted Capper's silent laughter to ask if the Madame Bilêl in question had been a Miss Tregarthen. If so he must call on her.

Both Borrodaile and Capper sat up at this. "Call?" said one. "On her?" said the other.

"Why not?" challenged Roy.

"Oh, why not!" agreed Capper; but his smile rankled in the mind of Inexperience.

"I don't know what you two fellows mean, but I'm going to call there to-morrow!" he flashed out.

"Your cutlet's cold!" was all the satisfaction he got. "Eat it, man, before it gets any colder! Do tell us to-morrow evening what you talked about and what frock she wore!"

Then they spoke of the things that interested them, while Roy listened, feeling that somehow he had made a false step and in the depths of their minds below their casual chat they were thinking him a fool.

He went to call on Mrs. Bilêl, nevertheless, as he had said he would.

The famous annual Cotillon ball at Shepheard's was to take place that night, but Roy strolled into the big dining-hall in anything but a festive frame of mind. His face reflected his mood and scarcely lightened even when his eyes fell upon Mrs. and Miss Brayton in the distance. He had not known they were in the country, but if they were so much the better for him, and towards them he wended his way. They at any rate were familiar faces in a land that for the moment was jarring upon him heavily. Mrs. Brayton invited him to their table; he sat down at once in silence.

"Genius won't light up?" remarked Edith after a glance at his tell-tale face.

Oh, yes, he had done some work, and in proof produced a pocket sketchbook where they criticized half a dozen clever thumb-nail types of native women, sherbet-sellers, Bedouins and water-carriers. No, that was not it. Suddenly he said—

"This place is so bizarre! You don't know in the end where beauty ends and hideousness begins! And the people are like the country!"

Such an outburst was so unlike the usual light-hearted Roy that both ladies looked carefully at him. The far-famed Italian orchestra struck up at the other end of the hall and Roy set his teeth.

"We're just here for the night," said Mrs. Brayton. Interested chiefly by her own affairs she seldom thought of others for long. "To-morrow we go back to Mena House! That's where we are staying, you know. I am tired of Helouan—such a kiln of a place!"

Roy smiled abstractedly. Nothing, Edith saw, would lift him out of his preoccupation. So she left him alone

—they would have time enough for discussion afterwards when her mother would retire upstairs, eschewing the noise, which already filled the dining-room with the roar of a tempest.

Sure enough, as they sat on wicker chairs in the lee of a lotus-headed pillar, one of several that supported the painted Egyptian ceiling, he told her of his afternoon's adventure, while two thousand head and more of Cairo society poured through the dark velvet curtains that screened the entrance door.

He had found the house with no difficulty, for his dragoman knew it well and took him there direct. It was a grey plaster erection with plenty of stucco and steps and columns that you thought were marble but turned out to be painted wood. A Dutch garden was laid out in geometrically formal beds, among which wound little patterned paths of coloured pebbles. Terra-cotta figures of gazelles and German gnomes completed its attractions, save that the tram-lines ran immediately behind the house. Every window seemed hermetically closed and only the bowab (porter) at the door showed any sign of life. The man blinked at him on hearing his request, and after several repetitions—finally made clear by the lingering dragoman, who supplied an Arabic version—he was led without definite satisfaction up the steps into the selamlik, the little guest-room at the corner of the ground-floor verandah that is found in every native house, and there left to wait *and wait.*

Edith, her eyes on the automatic bending backs of the hotel staff as the stream of Cairo affluence flowed between the lifting curtains, listened to the ingenuous tale. Now and again she bowed to a passing acquaintance, while

her mind was occupied with the hidden meaning of the drama the young man unfolded before her so graphically, for though inexperienced and unformed, his sensibilities were abnormally developed.

"What is the matter with them?" he reiterated to her. "By then I knew something was wrong somewhere." And when Bilêl came smiling in and gave him coffee and cigarettes and talked about nothing-in-particular, the spirit in him was chastened. He asked for Madame Bilêl, it was true, and learnt that she was not at home. Soon afterwards the whir of a motor stopped outside and a glance out of the unshuttered window showed him that three massive ladies swathed in black cloaks and white Turkish veils were waddling across the pebbled paths to the iron gate. Olive Tregarthen was obviously not one of these.

"Is Madame Bilêl not well then?" he asked, only to hear that she did not live here. Mystified, he made no further effort to achieve his social obligation and presently took his leave. What did it all mean?

Edith had met the eyes of Borrodaile, who some time ago had marked her down. He drew near tugging on his gloves, and she rose to meet him, saying easily to Roy that in his place she would not try any more to find out.

"But I like her!" he protested. "Why should I give her up to a beastly native?"

Borrodaile claimed a dance and Roy yielded his place by Edith's side. He might not dance for fear of getting hot, so he moved away from the sight of tantalizing preparations.

"Won't you come now?" asked the young railway servant's pleasant bantering voice. "There's such a

crush I've abandoned the idea of a card! I ask any lady I can find for the first dance that comes!"

They edged their way through the shifting, jamming crowd, past currents of heavy scent and snatches of laughter and talk till they could join the whirl of dancers that swung and bumped shoulder to shoulder over the polished wood floor. The great hall, which had been the dining-room only an hour before, soon grew warm, and Edith and her cavalier sought the Moorish lounge with its welcome gloom beyond the arches to rest and regain breath.

"Sims-Evans seems a bit perplexed this evening! I thought he would be!" chuckled Borrodaile. "Can I get you anything? Claret-cup, lemonade—no? Then we can talk! He's been on his harêm adventure, has he?"

Edith settled herself in her comfortable low chair and set her silver tunic straight before she spoke.

"Oh, what was that?" she said with languid interest, resolved not to give Roy away unless he had already given himself.

Evidently he had, for Borrodaile retailed to her with gusto the conversation in his "digs" the night before. "We didn't tell him anything," he concluded. "He wouldn't have been happy till he had tried it!"

After a question or two to find out how much he really knew, Edith herself added a colour or two to the picture he had outlined.

"By Jove, 'not there'!" cried out Borrodaile. "That means she's at some villa of his somewhere else—provinces, I expect! This *is* a go! I wonder—you know her mummy, don't you?"

"If you mean Mrs. Tregarthen, I do," corrected Edith coolly, fanning herself.

He looked fixedly at her a moment, then laughed. "I accept the snub! Your friend, Mrs. Tregarthen, then! I wonder if she'll like that idea?"

"I couldn't say," was the calm reply, and he laughed again.

"You are cautious!"

Then they drifted into other subjects. Since the year before Maurice Harvey had been very little in Cairo. They were making some new canals which kept him very busy, but he was here to-night. Had she seen him?

"No," quietly. She was looking through the arches at the great brilliant dancing hall, but felt his scrutiny nevertheless. Herself she was aware of the tone of voice she had used, unusual to her own ear. Here to-night! She had not seen him for five months! How far had he gone in the interval—on which path, to the right or the left? He had stood at the fork of the ways in September. Now it was January. Which path—which path had he taken?

"Have you seen the Jamesons?" asked Borrodaile, proceeding on his own mental lines. "They were here too to-night. Charming woman, Mrs. Jameson!"

"Very," agreed his partner, and rose as another dance began. "Every one seems to be here to-night!"

In the distance she had seen Mrs. Tregarthen, resplendent in flashing jet and sequins, making for the place where her aunt Lady Bonner was established, under some greenery in a corner of the big ball-room. She was going, Edith was convinced, to speak of her daughter and of Lady Bonner's attitude towards the situation.

The latter lady had declined to accept any hint of advice on her line of action. So Edith drew near to interrupt any upsetting interview that might threaten, and sure enough as she came up she heard—

"Poor Olive, buried away in the country, you know, feels it so much that no one has been to call on her—yet Marg is not *so* far, dear Lady Bonner! Is it?"

The reply was soft and diplomatic, but none the less firm, as her interlocutor saw.

"I can't understand," complained the troubled lady, "why my poor daughter can't use the motor when the other ladies"—still rather a bitter pill—"of my son-in-law's household don't want it! However, I suppose he knows best!" She was subdued. Through her daughter she was obviously suffering. Then came her direct petition—could Lady Bonner ever find time to pay a call at Marg?

A straight stroke would be most merciful. "I am afraid I cannot, under the circumstances."

"Circumstances? What circumstances?" In the tone the poor lady heard a ring of warning that struck her nerves like a knell of coming disaster.

Another merciful blow. "Dear Mrs. Tregarthen, you have mentioned your daughter's position in Cairo. She is too attractive to pass unremarked. I'm afraid the world has drawn conclusions that are false"—and she paused to bow in response to a friendly greeting.

Mrs. Tregarthen's face was dyed deep crimson and she sat up. "How abominable! Do they say my girlie is—isn't married?"

Her position was very equivocal, out here. Marg was

a district of good repute, but of course such villas as her daughter lived in—alone—lent themselves to many different constructions.

The lady sat aghast for a time. Her son-in-law had told her none of this! Naturally not, said Lady Bonner, perhaps he did not know it or care if he did.

"How terribly different are their ways of thought from ours!" sighed she. "I must confess I was surprised that Mahmud had not brought her to this function to-night! I know she was anxious to come. I told him I was surprised, too!" She did not mention the reply she had received: with a Parisian shrug and brilliant exhibition of smiling white teeth, that either Olive was his wife or she was not, and it was not customary for Egyptian wives to attend European functions. (Olive had foolishly agreed to wear a veil according to his wish.)

"She is learning her lesson quickly," smiled Lady Bonner pitifully to her niece as they viewed the poor lady's receding back. "Poor Olive!"

Edith was sorry for them, but she was looking for Maurice on her own account, though she was undecided whether to speak to him if she met him. It would satisfy her to see him at a distance. On sight near or far she would know how it was with him. So she moved away alone among the drifting currents of the crowd, exchanging words now and then with friends who crushed by, but never joining any party. She did not meet Maurice for the reason that he was sitting in the cold wind out on the verandah with Lucy, who was miserably telling him how ill her husband was, though he had insisted upon coming here to-night, Heaven knew why.

"Didn't you want to come?" said Maurice, pulling her cloak closer around her.

"Oh, yes, I did, but I wouldn't tell him so!" she answered.

"Did he ask?"

"Yes; but I don't see how he could tell what I wanted!"

Maurice smiled above a pang of bitterness that shot through his heart. Jameson had come not to disappoint her, he knew as well as if he had been told by the man himself. "Where is he now?" he inquired.

She did not know, nor want to know. And upon that silence fell. Pain pulsed in the air around them both, while the white electric lights flickered above them.

"Is he getting no better?" remarked Maurice at length.

The garish theatrical house-fronts opposite blurred before her rising tears, and she stared hard at them, winking quickly. "How can I bear it?" she whispered.

Maurice turned sharply. His eyes had been on the dawdling street hawkers. Now they flashed on her face as keen as a tiger's. "What, that he's still seedy, you mean?" he asked, lowering.

She threw back her graceful curl-crowned head with a gesture of anguish that he closed his eyes to avoid seeing. "No, no!" she cried low. "Him! Life with him, I mean!"

Pause.

Maurice set his teeth. She was playing restlessly with her fan. "I'm afraid there's no help for it!" he said slowly at last. "This is where self-control comes in!"

"Self-control! Are you a stone to talk of self-control —now?"

"No, I'm not." He spoke almost coldly, so great was the restraint he put upon himself. Used by long self-torture to the self-control he spoke of he had perhaps come, he thought, to fancy it easy. To a sheltered woman the bonds must be very irksome. "I'm very sorry for you, poor little woman! I wish we'd never met! With all my heart I wish that! But since we have met, this thing has got to be faced out! It can't be left as it is! We've got either to go back or to the side. We can't go back"—he did not mention going forward—"so it's got to be the side. Bonner's here to-night. I'll ask him to put me up to the Soudan if he can."

"No, no! Why go away? Don't leave me!" she cried, and put her hand on his arm.

He gasped and held himself hard. The touch thrilled him like an electric current, and he rose to escape it. One or two people had come out of the hotel wrapped up and had gone home.

"Come!" he said almost roughly. "We must go in! The Cotillon must have begun!"

She took his arm obediently and they re-entered the revolving door behind which swirled such a breathless turmoil of hot air and heavy scents. The feature of the evening had evidently commenced. Numberless ladies carried baskets of paper flowers or wore large paper hats of exaggerated fashion.

Just inside the curtain Edith met them and with her was Capper. Their faces were grave, nay, Edith's was anxious.

"Ah, at last!" exclaimed Capper, his half-closed eyes

upon Lucy's flushed face. What had they been doing outside?—had gone to the considerable trouble of fishing out their wraps too! He glanced for information at Maurice, but that close-held countenance told nothing. "Queer place for your flirtation, on Shepheard's terrace in a freezing north wind!" he commented genially.

"You call it a flirtation?" challenged Maurice composedly. "It's a tragedy!"

Capper laughed. "Sorry to 've offended your dignity! Well, you're wanted inside. Jameson fainted just now in the ball-room."

Edith had told Lucy.

"Where is he?" asked Lucy without moving.

Their doctor, who was here this evening, had taken him over and where they were now——

"Go and fetch him!" said Edith to Maurice. "He should go home!"

He met her glance and obeyed on the instant. Lucy watched him go. Then she turned on Edith with a steely glitter in her blue eyes, while Capper stood by.

"I don't believe he's ill!" she almost hissed to the silent girl. "You've made it up just to get me away from here! But I won't go! You engineered things in Cornwall—you won't find it so easy again!"

Edith gasped. "Are you mad?" she said. "What are you talking about?"

"Oh, I know you're in love with Maurice!" the other flung out. "That's why you move heaven and earth to keep me away from him!"

"Mrs. Jameson!"

Capper hopes never to this day to hear such a cry again. Pride rang in it, and agony and anger. The tall

girl stood like a statue, while red fire burned in her hazel eyes.

"You may go your own way!" she said, low. "I won't help you any more."

Lucy laughed bitingly. "Thank you for nothing!" and curtsied as her husband came slowly out of the crowd with his elbow locked into Maurice's arm. Black circles stood beneath his eyes and his lips under his moustache showed purple.

CHAPTER VIII

HE looked at his wife and said with an effort at a smile—

"I'm going home, dear, but you needn't come if you don't want to." He left an infinitesimal pause as if leaving an opening for an answer, but as none came—Lucy was studying the rug at their feet—he went on with a rush: "Of course I'll get along all right!"

She raised her head to ask how he would go, and he said he would drive in the dogcart. This she accepted, though it was manifestly impossible that *he* should drive.

"Don't be worried, darling," he added. "Harvey, you'll see her home in a taxi when it is all over?" He spoke lightly, but his tired eyes pleaded for a second as they rested on his wife. Only for a second, however, for they met no flash of response. Then with a "Good-night!" he made for the revolving door but was obliged to pull up sharply to avoid an army officer coming in quickly. He staggered on recovering himself and Edith said without another thought—

"Oh, you're not fit to go alone!"

No sooner had she spoken than she felt her mistake. Lucy's long piquant face hardened like stone, and taking Maurice's arm she swept aside the curtain behind them all, which fell back into place again after she and her

escort had passed through, cutting off Edith, Capper and Jameson.

Capper met Edith's rapid glance as Jameson started for the door again, heedless of their presence.

"Some one ought to be with him!" she said swiftly. "Mr. Capper, can *you* do anything?"

"Go with him, you mean?"

She nodded.

"I'll try," and he followed Jameson, who by this time was outside in the cold wind on the terrace. Edith, watching through the glass doors, saw a short parley and then Capper returned saying that the invalid had no opinion of his, Capper's, judgment. He considered him officious. Had there been any necessity his wife would have come with him—of course! The implication that Edith had been officious too, if indeed not chiefly so, was none the less clearly understood between them because it was unsaid.

She turned back beside Capper without a word, thinking of the quick look from under lowered eyelids that had passed between Lucy and Maurice at the husband's suggestion. But she had already exceeded the limits of an outsider's interference. Capper had seen her humiliation and she wanted to be alone for a breathing-space, so she dismissed him when they reached the ball-room and retreated to a corner beside the stair balustrade where there was just room for her to stand and look over the heads of the people seated around her. The buffet-room had opened, so not so many dancers crowded the floor. Among those who had not sought the buffet were Maurice and Lucy. To-night for the first time Maurice's composure had deserted him—he looked worried. But

his partner was at her best—graceful and slender she swayed on his arm to the music's rhythm. As they went by her eye fell upon Edith, and she spoke in his ear with a flicker of malice in her glance that Edith caught even so far away as she was.

"I like her," rebuked Maurice, and their eyes met at very close quarters. In his she read a stubborn resistance to her criticism. In hers he saw ill-nature that pained him.

"Are you in love with her?" she thrust. "She is with you!"

His arm that supported her quivered, she felt it, but his face told nothing. "Oh, no, you're mistaken, Lucy!" quietly. "She's just a friend, and a very kind one. You don't know how kind!"

"Don't I?" she challenged, curious.

"She knows all about us," he said, and half-closed his eyes, "and she hasn't told a soul!"

A stab of alarm ran through her heart, but then she plucked up courage again, and rage filled her against the cold calm girl who thus held them in the hollow of her hand. She turned to another subject. "*Will* you drive me home then?" she questioned to try him, and laughed gaily when she found he answered like a horse to the spur.

Of course he would! "Only not a taxi! An arabiyeh (carriage), please!" About this he was businesslike, not to say masterful. "It lasts longer!"

"Then you still love me?" she breathed. "I'm not a burden to you—yet?"

His answer left nothing to be desired and she was satisfied for the time. Lucy's was an insatiable soul—it

must have more and yet more. Its exactions were many as beads on a string.

Edith moved away before they made the circuit again. She had seen that they spoke of her and she shrank from the look in Lucy's steel-bright eyes. Close to her were Bonner and a portly old pasha in a tweed suit that agreed ill with his red tarbush. They were in syllabic converse to which she attached no importance till, a block on the stairway forcing her to a standstill, she saw Maurice's eye upon them as he swept by. He evidently strove to read each face and yet not show his eagerness. He also saw his Chief shake off Bilêl Pasha, go up to Edith and take her away with him outside into the corridor.

"There's Sir Donald!" said Maurice to his partner, drawing out of the main stream. "If I must go—the sooner the better! I'll ask him now for the Soudan!"

"No, no!" and her fingers tightened on his arm. "You mustn't leave me! You'd be heartless to go now!"

"It must be done!" he returned. They were now at the foot of the stairway up which Bonner and Edith had gone. "We've left it too long already! This can't go on! Forgive me if I leave you here! I must see him!"

"But you will drive me home?" she cried in dismay. He was beyond her control now. Something had almost maddened him.

"Yes, yes! I promised that!" and telling her to get her things and meet him in the hall in twenty minutes he turned and was gone in the moving crowd without waiting for her reply. The plunge was taken now irrevocably. There could be no going back. Following in the direc-

tion Bonner and Edith had taken he soon became wedged in the crush about twenty paces behind them so that he could move neither back nor forward but could just see their heads above the crowd. Both were of commanding stature.

As he reached them Edith was bidding her uncle a smiling good night, but when she saw him coming her smile died down.

Contrition smote him. He had not once asked her to dance! Was it too late now?

It seemed from her next speech as if she had read his thought. "Nearly two o'clock! Good night, Mr. Harvey!"

"There's another waltz yet!" he pleaded as faint strains percolated through the bustle of departure. "Won't you give me *one*?"

She laughed lightly, though her eyes remained grave and watchful. "You can't make out that the reason we haven't danced is *my* fault, Mr. Harvey! Aren't you too tired to go on?"

"I'm never too tired!"

A very expressive little "Ah!" and the watchful smile. Then she added: "But sometimes I am!" and without haste though without pause she walked away toward the iron grille of the lift.

"Edith is worn out!" said Lady Bonner; but her husband did not answer. His attention was directed upon Maurice who, to judge by the look with which his eyes followed the deliberate receding figure, was hard hit somehow or other. Having arrived at this conclusion, Bonner stowed it in his memory and turned to other matters suggested to him by Bilêl Pasha.

"Harvey," said he, "what do you think of Mahmud Bilêl as an inspector? Is he worth it?"

Maurice laughed. "Rather a good joke is that, I think, sir! Worth it? When last year he was fined and degraded over that business of the pumps!"

They were standing near two columns set side by side with a space of about six inches between them. Something moving in this niche on the opposite side caught Bonner's eye and he looked through quickly to meet the crab-like gaze of Bilêl Pasha, who seeing himself caught eavesdropping resolved to brazen it out. He joined them to ask—

"And why is it a joke to promote my nephew, Mr. Harvey?"

Bonner glanced at his subordinate. The old intriguer had evidently heard the whole of Maurice's speech, but the young man did not yet grasp the possible consequences of his words. A native never forgets a slight, and here—if Bonner was not mistaken—the blandly venomous old man thought one was meant.

"No joke, pasha," rejoined the Irrigation Chief, "and I'm doubtful if there's any promotion either! Last year, you see, there was an unfortunate affair——"

"Only one!" with outspread hands. "A little piece of indiscretion, no more! He will not do it again! Besides, last year is last year and now—*hein*, it is *this* year!"

Bonner good-naturedly shook his head and after the offer of a cigar to both Englishmen in turn, by both refused, Bilêl Pasha took his departure. Then Bonner listened with puckered brows to Maurice's proposition, delivered in lame and halting words.

"I don't understand you, Harvey!" said he at length. "There are alterations going on in your province that keep every one working at full pressure—Jameson is seedy—and you choose this time to ask for transfer because as far as I can make out you're interested in Soudanese scenery. Now, Harvey, what is your real reason for wishing to change?"

Maurice, watching the lift with Edith as its burden shoot up its tube, had nothing to say except: "Then you won't recommend me, sir?"

"No. They don't want shirkers there. I can't tell you, Harvey, how deeply I am disappointed in you! If you dislike your work—resign!"

The inspector coloured hotly up to the roots of his hair, and looking his Chief full in the eyes he said good night and went to rescue his coat and muffler in the cloakroom that buzzed like a hive down the corridor. Then he came out again and sat under a lotus-headed pillar to wait for Lucy. His interview had been shorter and more disastrous than he had imagined.

The outgoing crowd streamed past him. Half the lights were out and he sat at an angle whence he could see the clock above the hall-porter's counter, but its record only accentuated her delay. His was an unobtrusive wicker chair but soon he heard himself accosted by a smooth voice and looked round to behold the equally smooth countenance, beneath its tarbush, of Mahmud Bilêl. The district engineer was smiling as he fingered his neat moustache and after Maurice's somewhat formal return-greeting held out his cigarette case. "No?" unabashed at the refusal. "Can I give you a lift in my motor, Mr. Harvey—or do you

await some one? Mrs. Jameson can't have much fun with her husband so rocky, can she?"

To this piece of incredible impudence Maurice made no reply save to rise and walk away.

Bilêl fell back outwardly respectful as Bonner took up Maurice on his way to the door with his party.

At that moment Lucy appeared in her turquoise blue wrap with its swansdown collar and hood that framed her thin face so softly, and Maurice explained that Jameson had told him to take her home. By the time he had finished explaining they were all—Bilêl too—on the terrace.

Maurice and Lucy were the first of the party to leave. Bilêl had lit a cigarette and with his elbows resting upon the iron railing that edged the terrace leaned there smoking, an indistinct figure under the shadow of the cactus-palm in its tub close by the steps. His eyes followed the ramshackle arabiyeh in which Maurice and Lucy, tucked up in rugs to guard against the cold night wind, had started upon their long drive. After it had rattled round the corner he felt a presence beside him and turned, stretching, to find his uncle at his elbow puffing a big cigar.

"*Eh bien?*" asked the young man.

The older-fashioned man replied in Arabic. "They laughed and the moufettish (inspector) spoke against thee."

"Is it so? What said he?" The young man had forgotten his French whims and spoke as keen as a hound on scent.

"He said thou wast nothing worth." Bilêl cursed under his breath and struck the iron railing with his

fist. "Say not so. I will now talk to some others," went on the old man, "who are my friends. We will succeed."

Then they descended the steps together and got into young Bilêl's car. He took the wheel and drove after Maurice and Lucy down the Sharia (street) el Manakh under the cold-eyed stars.

CHAPTER IX

THERE were other carriages on the streets and motors too, but not many. Long stretches of road were quite silent. None but home-going revellers were abroad. The night was too chill for the nocturnal motor runs to the Pyramids and back beloved of the Cairene young blood.

Till they were abreast of the Kasr el Nil barrack-yard neither Lucy nor Maurice stirred, though each was acutely conscious of the other's presence. Then the cutting wind from the river reached them and Lucy lowered her hooded head. Maurice pulled the rug they shared higher over her and tucked it in, leaning far out of the carriage to do so. She caught hold of his shoulder.

"Don't fall!" she cried, a little alarmed, and at the same time: "Tuck it tighter!"

He smiled as he finished his work and drew back. "That better?" he asked, and he felt her snuggle deeper into the warmth beside him.

Now they were on the bridge and the breath of the north wind whistled keen as a sword through the girders and cross-bars. Below the bridge the water rippled against the piers and the lights of Boulac on the one hand and those of the Garden City and Roda Island on the other shone out sparkling on the glancing facets of each wavelet, while the white pile of the *Semiramis*

Hotel rose ghostly and lightless on the river bank. The dark mass of trees on Gezira loomed before them like a coming evil.

"I wish Jameson hadn't told me to see you home to-night!" said Maurice suddenly, unsteadily.

A low gurgle of laughter was the almost inaudible response. "Well, if you didn't like it why did you come? Go back to your Edith and I'll go on alone!"

To this he made no answer. They were clattering over the "English Bridge" at the far side of the island when she went on: "You have a craven heart, Maurice! You never enjoy what has come for fear of what may be coming! What are you afraid of now?"

Her taunt reached its mark, but he gave no sign of that except by his silence. He was thinking of things that he knew she would scout, therefore he would not lay them bare before her.

"I am afraid of myself," he said at length, his eyes on the stars that looked down through the black-velvet branches of the lebec trees that shadowed the road on either side.

"Of yourself?—quite sure it is not of me?" she laughed, and stole a look at him.

"I am a fool," he said, and he told her of Bonner's refusal and subsequent anger. But he did not tell her that were he not strong enough to leave her alone, that door of escape into the Soudan was for ever closed to him. Nor—now—might he ask for leave. Whatever befell he must stand at his post and endure it all.

But on hearing of the frustration of his desire Lucy clapped her hands and rejoiced like a happy child. "Take what the gods give you!" she cried.

"That would scarcely do always!" he returned, holding himself in, for he longed to take her in his arms. "I wonder how Jameson is?" he went on, trying to set her into another groove of thought.

"How you think of him!" she laughed. "He is all right! Nothing ever happens to him! He's like the brook that goes on for ever!"

In the darkness Maurice turned away his face as vicarious pain suddenly possessed him. That a man's wife could speak thus of her husband, even to her lover! Was she heartless? No matter, he loved her. Every turn of her head, every movement of her hands roused his pulses and drove them to racing point.

"I can't help thinking of Jameson," he said, so low as to be almost a whisper, "because I'm always thinking of you!"

She laughed again at this confession, that delightful husky gurgle, and slipped her hand between his arm and his side. The gurgle rippled out once more, for she felt him stir under her touch and the knowledge of her power gratified her. A local fog lay across the road. It surrounded them and their driver humped his shoulders and coughed. Lucy felt it cold and clammy upon her face. She glanced around. They were hidden from the world, she thought. Even the gas lamps placed alternately down the road stood shrouded in white mist, and though the roar of a motor filled the damp air no one could tell whence it came, whether from before or behind.

"Kiss me, Maurice!" she appealed. She put back her hood and the dim light of a lamp fell upon her face and soft parted hair. He hesitated a second, then his

self-made bonds burst and his arms went round her, his lips devouring hers. Glowing through the mist came a motor's lights and a big car rushed by almost touching their wheels, so close did it pass and so quick that there was no time to disengage from the embrace. A face looked out at them for the instant that the car swept past. Was it imagination or was it real that Maurice recognized those features ?

" Was that Bilêl, Lucy, did you see ? "

She had seen nothing. Her eyes had been closed in ecstasy and she was still trembling from her encounter with his love.

But Maurice was sobered at once, as a man far gone in drink is corrected by a douche of icy water. For he had recognized Bilêl's car if he could not swear to the occupant and he would have sworn to an " Ah ! " he heard as the car flashed abreast.

He bit his lip, sat still and said never a word till the arabiyeh drew up at the house he had indicated to the driver on the river bank. Here the air was clear and as he unwound Lucy from her rugs he sent a glance across the moving waters to the regular line of lights all along the empty thoroughfare on the opposite bank. Somewhere beyond them was his comfortless bachelor room awaiting him.

" I'll keep this fellow to drive back with," he broke silence as he carried her wraps up the steps for her. " Just come and tell me if you need a doctor."

Through the ground glass panels of the door there shone a yellow glow. A lamp evidently burned inside. Lucy opened the door neatly without the aid of matches. " Oh, I know it so well ! " she said with a sigh in response

to his offer of assistance. "And I shall know it better yet, I suppose!"

The door swung open and the north wind that rushed in past them made the lamp waver and smoke so furiously that Lucy ran and picked it up. Maurice had not come in. He was standing on the threshold, his arms full of rugs and his face white as a sheet.

"Come in and shut the door!" she said. "What are you waiting for?"

If she did not understand he could not explain his reluctance to enter Jameson's domain now and thus. He came in therefore and closed the door, but after putting down her belongings on a settee he went back to the door and stood uncovered with his hands on the latch waiting her return. The tiled hall with its wide white staircase up which she had walked, the pale blue walls just the colour of her opera-coat and the rich sombre Persian rugs, one of which was his own wedding-present, all breathed of her. He fixed his eyes on the lamp within its silk shade on a table out of the draught on the far side of the spacious hall and prayed that she would come back and give him his release. In the stillness that reigned after her rustling departure he could hear a mouse gnawing somewhere.

She seemed to be gone a long time. Then she reappeared, running down the stairs with her open cloak streaming like wings behind her.

"He—he's not there!" she gasped. "It's empty!"

She and Maurice stared at each other. There had been nothing—no accident—to be seen on the road on their way, or had they in their absorption missed the wreckage of any smash or perhaps Jameson himself

lying alone on the roadside while a terrified sais drove frantically for help? Then Maurice looked at the hat-stand. No, neither coat or cap was there.

Lucy without a word opened the study door and to their mutual relief a steady yellow glow immediately streamed out. Her back toward Maurice, Lucy stood motionless looking into the room where her husband evidently was, for soon his voice, querulous and peevish as Maurice had never yet heard it, asked some inaudible question. Then the sentence came clearly—

"I wonder you thought it worth while to come home at all as late as this!"

She made no rejoinder, motionless and agaze.

Maurice found himself speaking through a thick rush of rage to his head, as he came up closer to the doorway—

"Jameson, don't talk like that to your wife. It doesn't sound pretty!" and himself he heard the edge in his tone. Now he could see into the room. The loosely-built red-headed Scotchman had just uncoiled his long length from the sofa and the lamplight threw his gaunt shadow gigantic on the wall and the book-shelf behind him.

"I won't be told by you how to treat my wife!" he blazed. "I didn't ask you to come in at this time of night! Good night—or rather good morning, Harvey!" He pointed towards the front door.

Maurice stood his ground. "I'll go when you've apologized to your wife!" said he determinedly. "You asked me to see her home!"

"Did you hear what I said?" and his host took a menacing step forward, every muscle tense. "Are you trying to come between my wife and me?"

"Oh, go! go!" said Lucy from where she stood, quite expressionless.

"Jameson, are you stark mad?" asked Maurice.

"Get out!" was the only reply.

Maurice threw up his hands but turned without further remark and left the room, sick at heart. Would Jameson do violence to Lucy when he was gone? The door had slammed behind him, but when he was three parts across the hall he heard it open. He did not look round.

"Lucy, come back!" he heard Jameson call imperiously.

She evidently disregarded him, for Maurice found her immediately at his side. They traversed the tiled floor without speaking till near the front door, where the corner of a wall shut off the study. Then she said low and swiftly—

"It's—it's all right! He isn't like that except when he feels bad. He lets himself go, you know."

"I did wrong to come!" he muttered.

She had flung off her coat in the study and stood before him now as tasteful and charming a figure as she had done during the Cotillon manœuvres, save that now her white arms were innocent of covering and the yellow-shaded lamp on the table behind her threw up the slenderness of waist and throat. It hid the wan look in her face.

An uncontrollable impulse seized Maurice. "My poor darling!" he murmured and took her in his arms. Ah, what contentment wrapped them then! She lay cradled, lost in him, while his head bent lower and yet lower till for the second time that night their lips

met and clung. No thought of Jameson coming upon them crossed their minds. In this fleeting instant they would not have cared if he had.

But interruption came from another quarter—the ground-glass panels set in the front door with the darkness black behind them. The bell rang out tumultuously and Maurice felt Lucy quiver in his arms as the sound struck her over-wrought nerves.

"We're between the door and the light!" she whispered swiftly. "You open the door! I won't come out!" and she vanished like a flying ghost into the dining-room to tremble and listen in the gloom.

Maurice opened the door to meet the north wind in full blast across the Nile, and the less agreeable though suaver greeting of Mahmud Bilêl. The motor loomed outside the gate dark as a shadow with silent engines. How long had it stood there? Immaterial, for one question in laconic Arabic would suffice to draw all information from the now cloaked driver of the waiting arabiyeh.

"We meet again, Mr. Harvey!" The bland voice and courteous manner almost drove Maurice at the man's throat, but he merely stood with one hand on the moulding of the jamb and the other on the catch of the door, barring all entrance. "I just came to see if I too could be of any use to Mrs. Jameson," went on the Egyptian, alert for any trace of the feelings he suspected behind the mask. "Is Jameson so ill? Can I go for his doctor?"

Every word was a calculated insult and both giver and taker knew it as such, but Maurice answered without emphasis. No, Mr. Jameson was not so ill and he,

Maurice, would see to all that was necessary when he drove back to Cairo. Dismiss his carriage and accept a lift in Bilêl's motor? No, thanks, he preferred to drive. Good night, Bilêl.

The Egyptian saluted, smiling, and turned to go. As he did so he called past Maurice through the aperture of the half-open door—

"Good night, Mrs. Jameson!" then turned and ran down the steps expecting to hear the door banged. He started his engines quickly, and when he glanced up he was surprised to see a square of light—the door was thrown wide—and Maurice standing in the middle of it watching him in the wind.

"Arbaghi (driver)!" called the inspector sharply, and at something in his voice both the dozing coachman and Bilêl jumped instinctively. Then he disappeared inside—there was no hint of Lucy's presence—and when he came out wearing his hat jammed well down over his eyes the tail-light of the motor was far down the road, dim in a back-draught of dust.

Harvey closed the door behind him quietly and ascended the waiting conveyance in silence. "Zaalan (angry)!" thought the driver as he shook his reins. Maurice in truth was angry. He wondered dully when alone under the lebec trees how he had avoided leaping upon the man there and then. Bilêl had expected something of the kind, since he ran so fast down the steps.

Once Maurice stood up in the rickety victoria and raised both arms to the stars, saying aloud: "How can these things be?"

The driver looked round and so he sank back motion-

less till the carriage drew up before the marbled stucco archway of the pension where he rented a room.

In his own apartment he stood a moment collecting his thoughts after a glance at his timepiece, which said four o'clock. His train back to Hellal left the main station at seven. Two and a half hours to pack and have breakfast. Sleep must wait. Now he was so tired that if he sat down to rest he would oversleep, and as Jameson would take sick-leave for a few days some one must be on the spot for the canal works. So it would not do to miss that up-country express.

A few hours later he sat in a corner of a carriage crowded with tourists whose incessant babble scared away shy slumber, and so he spent the hours wondering whether his capacity for folly in the past could possibly be equalled in the future.

CHAPTER X

ROY SIMS-EVANS found Edith in the breakfast-room next morning and joined her saying—

"You look happy enough after a night of dissipation! Where's your mother? Having breakfast in her room? —what luxury! Well, age has some advantages! We young ones have to be careful what people think of us! Very becoming frock that is of yours! Is it zephyr? Do you mind my telling you your tie isn't straight? May I straighten it for you?"

"No, you may not!" she laughed, busying herself with its scarlet folds.

"How hard you are to me! Something to eat, please, waiter!" He was joyous this morning and made a very engaging picture in white flannels with his blue eyes and head of sunny curls as he attended to the very important business of his breakfast needs, towards which Edith assisted with a maternal eye. No one would have guessed from her appearance that she had spent a wakeful night thinking bitter thoughts through the hours, while the mosquitos sang around her nettings. Never robust of manner, her slight languor at the breakfast-table did not catch Roy Sims-Evans' attention, more especially as that young gentleman was already engrossed in watching Mrs. Tregarthen at a distant table investigate her mail. One letter received her

closest attention for some time, then she looked up and caught their eyes upon her and nodded across the room to them.

"It's that daughter, I'll be bound!" declared Roy under his breath.

"Olive, you mean?" said Edith, looking up from her plate.

"Yes. Oh, women don't realize their advantages! Fancy to be able to call that willowy lily 'Olive' without a second thought! If I did that you'd have a fit!"

"Here, here!" she admonished. "I don't go in for fits, but where do I come in? I thought I had first choice of you as a husband! And what do you propose to live upon when you put her existing lord and master out of the way?"

He complained laughingly of her terribly prosaic cast of mind. "I don't want to marry her!" he protested, "for the present, anyway! I like to look at her! Her get-up was always so perfect—Leghorn hat, sprigged thin gown, etcetera, thoroughly *à la* Marcus Stone! No, you're the woman I want to marry! *You* understand me!" with hand on heart and bright mischief in his eyes.

"Too well!" she retorted. "You are a dawdling chicken ten years my junior?"

"I'm twenty-four!" he declared with dignity.

She laughed.

He was aggrieved. "I may be a chicken, but I'm not a dawdler! Look here!" opening a sketchbook taken from his pocket. "Six in two days! I've only been in that limekiln, Helouan, for two days, and you say I dawdle! When my beastly bed on the roof shut up with me inside it too the first night! Dawdle!

My, but she was wild when I knocked her up at two in the morning!"

"Who?"

"My landlady, nationality not to be fathomed. She nearly bit me! But it wasn't my fault her bed turned out such a failure. I couldn't get out of it for a long time! I realized what a pearl must feel like inside an oyster! Dawdle!"

Edith laughed again and rose. "I withdraw the word! Come and see the telegrams."

Out in the hall at the Reuter notice-board they ran against Mrs. Tregarthen looking worried. In her hand was a crumpled ball that had once been a letter. She explained in a rapid undertone that her daughter was not well. The letter had been posted two days before and she felt called upon to go to see the invalid immediately. She did not wish to go alone, and could not take her other younger daughter. Would Edith come?

Roy was apparently absorbed in the telegrams, but an unobtrusive pressure against Edith's arm that was next him warned her of his adverse opinion. But she accepted the invitation regardless, and settled time and place there and then. When the energetic elder lady had gone to get ready Roy expressed his disapproval.

"If you mix up with natives I really *can't* marry you!" said he with a whimsical brow upraised.

Edith laughed. She was ready and waiting when Mrs. Tregarthen appeared with her younger daughter, whom she confided to Mrs. Brayton's care for the morning. Neither Doris Tregarthen nor her chaperon seemed enthusiastic at the prospect of close companionship,

but Edith saw them decide that an hour or two of each other could be tolerated.

"When am I to expect you back?" said Mrs. Brayton over the top of her paper.

"Don't be too long, mother!" cried Doris. Roy strolled up and undertook to amuse her. It could be done without difficulty. He sketched her portrait, leisurely, for he was in no hurry to return to Helouan before night. His description as yet of the place of his sojourn was: "Hateful hole!" Resignation had yet to come.

Miss Doris observed her mother's departure with a gleaming eye. Her views on her sister's predicament were natural and violent. She had never concealed the aversion to Bilêl that her mother had artificially stifled in herself and Olive.

"Mahmud's a beast!" she broke out. "I do hope Miss Brayton will get her out of his clutches at least this time!"

"Has your mother tried before, then?" asked Roy, busy with his pencil. "Don't move, please! This is most important!"

She spoke fierily, but rigid withal. "Oh, he fascinates mother! She went once to haul Olive away by force, and what happened? He met her on the doorstep and—she had tea and," in choking crescendo of fury, "ate Turkish-delight *and smoked*, and left Olive there after all!"

Edith sat at her companion's side, mute but not unheedful, during their taxi drive through the budding land of Goshen.

"I suppose Mahmud has some ideals of his own," remarked Mrs. Tregarthen pensively, her eye upon the squalid native town of Demerdache full of dirty goats, dirtier children and shards of pottery.

This was one indicative straw on the stream of her reflections. Another was—

"I wonder if he is tired enough of her to let her go without a fuss?" Said without rancour, this showed the deepest eddy. Far had the poor lady herself travelled in her outlook since last September, when she sent her bright self-willed daughter into the arms of the Eastern world with such blithe confidence!

Edith, looking at her square hard face, saw a look of doubt in her eyes, heretofore so masterful, and a new droop at the corners of the compressed lips, and she smiled quietly.

When their car drew up opposite the whitewashed garden walls surmounted by creeper-covered trellis, Mrs. Tregarthen did not seem too certain of her direction and looked anxiously up and down each stone-strewn, meagrely-shaded road that intersected the one they had followed.

"I think it was this way I came before," she said; "but they have no name upon the door!"

She was very hot, tired and dusty as at last she pushed at a wooden gate between two square whitewashed gate-posts. A big red motor stood incongruously before the entrance to the one-storied bungalow, secluded in its garden, and a lounging native chauffeur stared at the two English ladies coming in. There was neither bell nor knocker on the door, and after rapping on the glass panel with the head of a parasol they waited an uncon-

scionable time. Then a tall slant-eyed negro in a frock-coat came round the corner of the house and asked them what they wanted in somewhat imperfect English. Having ascertained their desire, he vanished whence he came and after about quarter of an hour opened the front door in company with Bilêl, who was smoking a cigarette with every appearance of nonchalance.

"Oh, nothing much is wrong with her!" he smiled in reply to their inquiries. "Raschid," to the eunuch, "go to the harêm with these ladies."

Edith looked at Mrs. Tregarthen, who was regarding the man with undisguised detestation, to the frank amusement of her son-in-law, who divided his attention equally between mirth at the expense of the angry, helpless lady and open admiration of the aloof, impenetrable girl. He followed the little procession up the bare, unpainted wooden staircase littered like the hall floor with old cigarette ends and the dry white bits of sugar-cane fibre chewed who knows how many days ago. The windows were all closed, so Edith as she went flung wide those that would open—not many, for the unseasoned wood had swollen and jammed for the most part, and those that had not thus sealed themselves were stuck together with the white enamel they had been originally painted with.

Olive's room was furnished with modern European furniture of ornate and carved description, and though a Brussels carpet occupied the centre of the floor the boards were bare like the stairs. Olive, hollow-eyed and with tangled lustreless hair, tossed in a big brass double bed which Bilêl mentioned—the first thing he said on entering the room—he had imported from Maple's.

The instant she saw her mother she held out her arms to her inside the mosquito netting. "Take me home!" she said.

"She may go with pleasure," responded Bilêl, speaking apparently to the ceiling, "when we have come to an arrangement!" and his eye fell approvingly on Edith, who met it, adamant, and turned away searching with her own for a brush and comb to dress the poor fair hair so matted and damp on the pillow.

All this took place under the small, monkey-bright eyes of the eunuch.

"Give her back to me!" said Mrs. Tregarthen, bravely composed but inwardly trembling lest he should refuse. "Then we'll leave you in peace!"

Bilêl laughed noiselessly. He read her clearly. "Take her if you care to! She is useless to me! Only," and he produced from his pocket a folded document of notepaper, "sign this before she goes."

Mrs. Tregarthen's mind was so confused with her emotions she was unable to grasp its purport, and referred it to Edith for judgment. A mean proposal—they might have Olive back if they claimed no item or farthing of her property, which must be made over to Bilêl whole.

The mother was bending over Olive in the bed, half under the mosquito-curtain, but a glance told that the feverish girl was aware of the scene going on and that it excited her.

"May I act as I think fit?" asked Edith. "I'll do my best for you, Mrs. Tregarthen."

"Yes, yes! I trust you quite!" was the anguished reply from within the netting.

"Then," said the tall girl turning to Bilêl, "come outside!" It was the note of a dominant race in her voice and he heard it, and it enraged him and cowed him at the same time. The eunuch also heard it, and after he had followed the two out of the room to the bare stair landing he shifted uneasily from foot to foot.

There in silence by the light of the coloured kaleidoscopic stair window she read the insulting agreement he had drawn up—then he had expected this!—in readiness for them to sign.

"By Mahommedan law," said she quietly, "when a man divorces his wife he must return to her family her dowry with her. I know that is so," and she looked at him reasonably.

"By Jove!" and the English exclamation sounded hopelessly tawdry on his lips, but nothing to what was coming. "You are the woman for me!" and he made as if to lay his hand on her arm.

"None of that!" and her voice forbade further trifling. The high-shouldered Nubian backed into shadow. No danger could come from him. There was only Bilêl to deal with, she saw, and before a woman's silent anger a man is always afraid. "Well?" she resumed, looking again at the paper in her hand.

The district engineer, foiled in his caress, gave his exasperation rein. "Bah! there is no law for this! It is not a Mahommedan marriage! She knows that—she knew it when she came to me! I have had her—I am tired of her! There—khalas (it is finished)!"

Edith, almost faint with loathing, looked up at the garish kaleidoscope-like window and her eye idly traced the fine cobwebs in the corners of each irregular coloured

pane. Outside the sun threw red, green and yellow pools of light through the window upon the boards at her feet. Her nausea grew and as she spoke at length with an effort her face was very pale.

"If Mrs. Tregarthen—who represents her family, and I—who am their witness—sign this I should think it would be enough. Miss Tregarthen," and she looked fixedly at him as she said the name, whereat he smiled, "need not, I fancy. Have you a pen?"

He produced a gold-nibbed Swan and she wrote her name under the draft.

"Copy it, please!" she said. "I want one to take away."

He sent the eunuch for paper.

"Do you understand that if your marriage is invalid this," tapping the draft, "is waste paper?"

He smiled anew. "Not quite!" he answered.

She saw he had the whip-hand while the poor fever-stricken girl was still in his house. Once she was free it would be a different story. But then the moral obligation would remain, if the paper was signed. He quite knew the value of signatures. In reality he knew more, much more, which he now proceeded to reveal. She was thinking of returning to the mother and daughter in the room, but he caught her attention back. Familiarly tapping her shoulder he said—

"If you and my charming mother-in-law make a fuss, beware! Last night I saw your friend Maurice Harvey kiss Mrs. Jameson in a carriage driving home after the ball. Her husband was not there, oh, no!" and he laughed low, peering into her face. "What price my silence?"

Edith looked, supremely scornful, at him for a moment and turned away with a slight shrug. "You've made a mistake," she said unmoved.

He was baffled. It had been a chance shot. Not the flicker of an eyelash betrayed how far it had struck into her soul.

At last the eunuch returned and she made a careful copy of the outrageous document that secured Olive's immediate person to her family. Mrs. Tregarthen signed the duplicates willingly in a pause while dressing her daughter.

"Oh, it's quite easy!" said she with relief.

"*Had it been?*" thought Edith; but she offered no remark.

Bilêl saw them off from the garden-gate and even waved his hand. "Bye-bye!" said he.

CHAPTER XI

JAMESON'S attack was an isolated one, occasioned by his over-straining his endurance at the ball. Save for the next day or two he did not abandon his work at the office, which since his illness he had taken up while O'Callaghan, the former office director, took his place in District. So he saw nothing of Maurice and except in the evening little of his wife. Since the scene when he had insulted both of them Lucy had been cold and unresponsive. He thought about that evening a great deal and each day wished many a time as he looked at his wife's brown curl-crowned head under a lamp or bent over the escritoire that he could decide whether better to apologize and talk it over or leave the episode to fade out of recollection.

His action, dictated then by raging pain, was a mistake in his campaign against his wife's indifference. She made no allowances. At length he resolved to speak. That, being the more difficult course, was, he hoped, more likely to be the better.

"Lucy!" one night after dinner as she left the dining-room.

She looked over the shoulder of her white lace tea-gown, but proceeded on her way with a languid "Yes?"

He said no more till they were upstairs in the drawing-

room, when bending over her chair he tried to lift her out of it to himself and felt her resist him merely by her dead weight against his arms. Then he dropped a kiss lightly on the parting of her hair, and she jumped as if she was stung.

"Don't do that again!" she cried sharply.

Jameson straightened, withdrew his hands behind his back and stood looking down at her dainty slim frilliness.

"Can't you forget what I said the other night?" he asked gently. "I didn't mean it, Lucy! I'm very sorry!"

She made no reply. Perhaps she thought to pick up and open a book was a completer answer than words. Minutes elapsed, ticked off by the enamel clock on the escritoire. Presently she looked up to find him standing in the same attitude before her, his eyes fixed upon her face, and she spoke wearily but with none the less intention.

"It's no use. We don't suit each other. What's the good of talking about it now?" Bitterness emphasized the last word.

Jameson bit his lip. His gaze never shifted from her face. "Speak for yourself, Lucy. *I* think some good may be got from talking it out."

She sprang to her feet with arms flung wide in a hopeless gesture. "No, none! None!"

Her husband heard the note of wild despair in her voice. Such an outburst was very unusual from so cool a woman. He brought his hands round to the front and laid them with open palms on the back of a chair, over which he leaned to question her. Questions were rising like bubbles to the surface of his mind.

"Why," he asked very quietly and intently, "why is there no use in talking?"

"Oh, don't argue!" she cried, twisting her fingers together.

His closed slowly on the bar of the chair where he still leaned staring at her now, fascinated. "This is getting important!" he muttered, unconsciously voicing his thought.

She looked, desperate, at the door, but he was between, and she knew he was very quick. No dodging would escape him, besides being undignified. She sat down with elaborate indifference on the chintz sofa whence she had risen and glanced up at the electric chandelier overhead.

"Have you found some one who suits you better?" he asked, measuring each word and its effect upon her.

"You are looking ghastly," she evaded jauntily. "Why make a scene when you fainted the other night without one?" but as she spoke her lips trembled and he saw them. Now he missed nothing.

"Never mind that," he returned. "Answer me," with a gentleness more terrible than any fury, "if you can. You *have* found some one who suits you better than I?"

Her head came up, while she trembled from head to foot as she reclined. "And if I have?" she challenged. Her voice, low and full, rang almost insulting, for at the moment she thought of Maurice, clean-cut and unafraid and ready to follow her for ever.

The room whirled before Jameson's sight. Flaming bars of red and yellow seared their way across his vision and he put both hands to his eyes as if to save them

from pressure. By a tremendous effort he stood upright and still. When the bars faded he removed his hands and looked at Lucy haggardly.

She rose, now pitying his suffering, and was about to offer him some support, but he waved her hands away.

"Well, in that case," he remarked quietly, "you had better go to bed. Good night."

She went without a word.

It was not a cold night, there was no wind and the stars burned bright in the sky. After she had gone he flung wide the window and turning out the lights sat on through the hours that went by like minutes till grey dawn stole into the chill room. He had not asked for the other man's name. The blow was yet too fresh. Besides, she would never tell. He sat on and on through the stealing dawn as a wounded soldier lies on the deserted battlefield wondering dully why, when and how he came to be there. Not yet was he interested to know particulars of his wife's lover; he was at present only concerned with his own feelings. A sense of loss and defeat lay crushingly upon him as if death had set a bony hand upon his heart. For long he had been aware of his incapacity to thrill and rouse Lucy, but had in his blindness never anticipated that some one else might. He had thought her too cold ever to feel the warming touch of love. And now—and now! Her face had lit with pride at the bare thought of another man! He had seen it.

Not so much anger as bitterness clutched his heart. All said and done she was his adorable wife to have and to hold, and until he chose to give her up she was his.

Because he had lost one campaign there was no reason to despair. Jameson came of a fighting Highland stock, and the blood that had stubbornly beat for Prince Charlie refused to let him sink now before adversity. He was thirty-three and Lucy twenty-five and the larger half of life lay before them both. Many campaigns are undertaken and pushed to a finish during a lifetime. George Alexander Jameson meant to win back his wife. He had tried patience with ill success. Now he would try other lines, and with that decision he rose from his chair, stretched his cramped limbs and went out upon the verandah to look at the dark trees against the pale saffron sky and the moving silhouettes of silent camels bearing their loads of clover early to the Cairo markets. Softly the guttural speech of the tramping drivers reached Jameson's ear through the crystal morning air. Pearly mist lay sheeted over the quiet waters of the Nile, shrouding the island of Gezira and the further bank with an impenetrable veil.

As Lucy came in to breakfast, trim and neat in a woollen morning frock, she looked doubtfully at her husband, whose appetite was already half appeased. But though he offered no matutinal kiss he rose to push in her chair.

"The Braytons said they were going back to Mena the next day when we met them at Shepheard's, didn't they?" was his first remark.

She looked up from the coffee-pot poised over her cup, a look of uneasy surprise in her blue eyes. "Yes," she answered a trifle breathlessly. "Why?"

"I'm rather thinking of going out there to see them this evening. What are you doing?"

"Playing tennis. It's a long time since you've played, George. Don't you feel up to it?"

He emptied his coffee-cup. "I'm all right," quietly. His health was never a topic of interest to him and now he was less inclined then ever to speak of it to her. "Who are you playing with?"

She enumerated a shade hurriedly and he passed each name under quick scrutiny. None of those would meet the case.

"Oh, I forgot Mr. Harvey!" she added easily with a watchful glance.

"What? Has he come down from the district again?"

"Just for the afternoon! He's going back to-night! Why shouldn't he?"

"Oh, of course, if he likes to it's his affair, but he——" He paused. His wife's watchful eyes had not escaped him a minute before and her defiant aspect did not escape him now.

She leaned forward over her plate. "But he—what?" she demanded.

"Nothing." Jameson for an instant had thought of saying Maurice was pretty often away from the district, considering how busy they were over the big new canal. But she might speak of it in public, so he stopped in time.

"You must tell me!" she insisted. Some intense tone in her voice made him look at her and instantly knowledge sprang fully formed into his mind. Maurice, his chum, his wife's lover! Never!

"Tell you?" he echoed. "Why? What is he to you?"

She pushed back her chair and rushed from the room. Jameson listened to the click of her heels across the hall tiles and the frou-frou of her skirts growing fainter as she ran upstairs. Then he leaned his head on his hands and groaned aloud. So it was true!

He needed time to think over the situation, so when he went to office he left a note to Lucy on the breakfast-table—after his departure she might come down and finish her meal and in any case the suffragi would give it to her—saying he would not be back to lunch and would go straight from office to the Pyramids, but that he would dine at home. The unwritten request that she should be home to dine with him he left to be understood. He must not allow his temper to sway him into any high-handed action, no matter what provocation he received, and he began to feel the difficulties that hemmed in a man in his situation. The first was that he would soon be compelled to have a business talk with Maurice, for accounts showed a leakage of water somewhere in the Hellal district and that was under his friend's control. Secondly, the Chief was not pleased with Maurice for some cause unspecified. How easy to prejudice him further! Jameson clinched his hands. He at any rate was going to play the game fair. Lucy knew he knew all and by to-night Maurice would know too. She would tell him this afternoon and then they would wait for his next step, but none would come. He had decided to outwait them in silence.

With the concentrated tensity of this resolve still upon him he sat making polite conversation with Mrs. Brayton while Edith and Lady Bonner talked over the escape of Olive Tregarthen. Curiously enough the

girl did not wish to leave Egypt at once. Now she was free and back with her own people she had picked up rapidly and nothing would suit but that they should all go up to Khartoum. They had already gone, to see what was to be seen, and Bilêl was apparently rejoicing in their departure.

"There's to be an aviation week here," announced Mrs. Brayton, as the secondary conversation came to a pause.

"How delightful!" said her sister-in-law. "Who is going to fly? I will come down for the day!"

Two or three Belgians were making arrangements out on the desert behind the hotel on the gymkhana racecourse. Sheds and palings were rising like magic out there to the accompaniment of much hammering.

Jameson listened thoughtfully and asked for the date of the aviation week. He would be compelled to go down to Alexandria some time this month for a few days and did not wish his wife to live alone in their house while he was away. The eleventh, that would do nicely! "May I billet her upon you? She would have something to occupy her and I'd be quite sure she was safe then."

"Charmed, I'm sure!" rejoined Mrs. Brayton. "Do you think she'd care to come?"

"Oh, yes, she'll come!" he answered quietly, his eyes on the eucalyptus trees that rustled in the sun and the breeze along the parapet overhanging the tennis-courts. "She'll come!"

"She may not want to!" laughed Edith. "Cairo might have counter-attractions!" Her voice was casual but her glance was keen.

"Possibly!" he responded, so drily that Lady Bonner gave him swift scrutiny. Apparently he was engaged upon botanical speculation, but his next speech was a guarded retraction of the slight slip he had made. "You see, I don't wish to put you to the bother of entertaining her. I know Mrs. Brayton is an invalid. It's so much easier to while away the time when there's something to look at." This was an incontrovertible truth, and soon afterwards he took his leave.

"Well, that's a burden off my mind," he said to Edith, who strolled down to the tram station to see him off. "You'll do me a great service by that." He was looking at the immutable Pyramids, scored and scarred by the passing ages. His khâki-coloured face betrayed nothing and his words everything. Edith smiled.

"I hope Mrs. Jameson will be comfortable here," she remarked.

He turned sharply and looked at her with a flash in his steel-blue eyes. "You don't want her!" he said. "Why?"

But she was ready. "She may not wish to come. I would quite expect it."

"Oh, I don't!" he replied, a shade grimly, as he swung aboard the hooting tram.

The girl waved farewell with unbroken composure. She watched the yellow tram slide away past the tree-trunks till their perspective hid it from view, and then she glanced with a sigh up and down the straight white road that ran as if ruled between its double line of lace-leaved lebec trees on and on into the pink haze of Egyptian distance.

She seemed more subdued, Lady Bonner reflected,

after her return from the tram than before; very subdued indeed. Her mother, groaning about arthritis, decided to go and lie down till dinner, which left Edith to enjoy a long holiday.

Unsuspecting, her aunt spoke of the Jamesons as a subject entirely fresh, hoping thereby to cheer her. But here, too, Edith was unresponsive. Then Lady Bonner laid her hand on the long crossed knee nearest her and said—

"I'm afraid, my dear, you are in trouble. Can an old woman like me be of any use?"

The girl's face turned white and her clear eyes suffused, but she shook her head. It was some seconds before the convulsive contraction in her throat allowed her to speak and then she merely confessed a few sleepless nights.

That was not enough to account for the little cloud upon her brows which if small seemed a fixture.

"In consequence of something that happened at Shepheard's?" hazarded the well-groomed "old woman."

If her niece felt surprise she showed none. She nodded and begged to be asked no more questions. The matter was beyond repair.

"One, and then I'll be quiet," was the rejoinder. "Was whatever happened to you that night the result or the cause of Mr. Harvey's asking Donald to send him to the Soudan?"

This action of Maurice, which she mentioned as an established fact, was evidently news to Edith. She considered it all the time the little waiter removed the débris of tea from their low Moorish table. After his departure she said without looking up—

"I think it must have been the result."

And Lady Bonner saw that instead of lightening the girl's load her efforts were only adding to it.

"What did Uncle Donald say?"

With that question and the strained intentness that accompanied it Lady Bonner thought she saw daylight.

"He wouldn't let him go," she said. "How does that strike you?"

The girl was evidently answered. The intentness faded from her face, but the light went out of her eyes also and she leaned back for a second and closed her eyelids.

"Doesn't that please you?"

Edith, on her guard, hesitated, though her whole soul cried out that his salvation lay in his going away. To say so, however, would be a breach of helpless confidence.

"Yes, I am glad he hasn't gone," she replied with half truth, but by now her aunt knew she kept something back.

"Are you in love with Maurice, my dear?" she asked gently.

Lucy had cast it forth with scorn for all the world to hear. Then Edith had held her head high and faced it out with clear eyes. Now though it came ever so kindly she shivered in admitting the truth.

"And have you refused him, Edith?"

"He hasn't come to ask."

"Does he know?"

"I *hope* not!"

To continue the subject was impossible. Both women felt that and were silent. Edith leaned her face in her hands on the table before her, secure in her corner

hidden by the musharabiyeh screen behind her. Not a sound escaped her and soon she sat up and put down her arms. When Lady Bonner saw the white rigid face words failed her.

"Does your mother know?" she got out at last.

"Yes, but she's not interested in it. Thank God for that!"

Her aunt laid a kind hand upon her shoulder. "Your secret is safe with me, my dear."

"Forget it, Aunt Leila!" She had recovered herself now, and when Lady Bonner went away she returned to her mother upstairs quite cheerfully. It would be interesting to see how Lucy would get out of her husband's plans, and if she could not—for he was scarcely to be trifled with in his present mood—what she would do when she was here. It would be an uncomfortable position for her, and indeed for them all. Edith remembered that he had not asked whether it would be convenient for his wife to stay under their wing. He had taken that distinctly for granted.

CHAPTER XII

MAURICE sat on his pony on the canal bank watching the myriad workmen coming and going with baskets to the big trench full of other ants armed with spades, who dug away for dear life when his eyes was upon them and sat down for a smoke when he was elsewhere. His coat-collar was turned up and the pony stood humped, tail to the north wind, in which there was a decided nip this January day. Up in the deep sky whenever a racing cloud intervened between earth and sun Maurice thought to himself: "Next time we'll have a gallop to get warm." It was not far off noon and they had done sentry-go up and down that bank since early morning, but Maurice, whose conscience was not quite easy on account of his runs to Cairo, was anxious to get as much work done now as possible. In his pocket was a letter that roused his conscience to do battle with his love till he almost feared that the men working below him would feel his struggle pulsating in the air around them. For Lucy had written that she must see him. Something had occurred which she had hoped was done with for ever. She could endure George no longer. Mercifully he was now away and "by his majesty's command," she wrote, she was staying at Mena House in the guardianship of his allies, the Braytons, who spied

upon her. He had probably told them to. Maurice must come and help her make a plan to get away, if only for one day.

"I must tell her it's no use," said he to himself. "She must stick to Jameson!"

An extra blast of wind whistled between his upturned collar and his neck. It was really too chilly to stand any longer. A touch of the spur sent his pony curvetting joyfully, presently to be given his head to go his very hardest along a footpath between the fields where tiny points of green were sprouting from the ploughed furrows in the dark-brown earth. His eyes half-closed against the wind under the visor of his cap, Maurice breathed deep while the ground flashed away from under him. The distant dead-looking mud villages and attendant palm-trees were beyond his vision. He merely looked where his pony was going, and let him go till they were brought up by a tributary canal. Sure enough the twelve-foot-wide channel glimmered reflections of the sky between its clumps of bamboo and Maurice pulled up as his steed's hoofs hammered upon the plank bridge that spanned it.

"That's better, old boy!" said he with a pat on the glossy shoulder as they wheeled, both now glowing warm. "Hallo, Bilêl! What are you so far away from the works for? I haven't seen you there once this morning! What have you been doing?"

The district engineer had been standing in the shadow of a bamboo clump beside the culvert. He came up smiling under Maurice's rebuke.

"I will go back with you at once, Mr. Harvey," he replied, suave as usual.

Maurice bent his level brows. "Better go now! I am riding!"

The Egyptian saluted and started at once. His tarbush blazed the colour of blood in the sunlight as he walked.

Then Maurice became aware that some one else was there, genuflexing in a familiar manner: Ramzy the Copt to be sure!

"May your day be happy, O master!"

"May thy day be happy!" shortening the reins.

The labourer laid a hand on the pony's bridle. "One moment! That is all I ask of the Presence!"

Maurice checked with a word of impatience under his breath. "Say on, but I am in haste!" Far away he saw Bilêl look back and stop.

"But one minute is all I ask of the Presence's time! I am only a poor man, O master, and since last year when I fell under disfavour——"

"Yes, yes, that is past! What now?"

Many excuses and hesitations veiled the request which when it came caused Maurice's mind, if not his person, to jump.

Might not the interest upon the sum lent by the Presence through Mahmud Bilêl Effendi to buy new seed in the stead of the crops which perished from drought, be lowered? Two hundred per cent. were hard terms for a poor man!

"Lent by me?" repeated Maurice. "I know naught of such lending!"

"I was wrong to have spoken! Yea, I was indeed foolish! Of course the Presence knoweth naught of these things! But now I am very poor! Even my

land will be taken from me if I do not repay every fadd (quarter-farthing) within six months! And I must render thirty ghine (pounds)! The master is in sore wrath——"

"Master! Which master?" interrupted the inspector, keen as a hound on scent. He was not in such a hurry now. Bilêl, a hundred yards away, stood still and watched. Maurice and Ramzy alone, and interested together! This suited the engineer's book. Several sheikhs on donkeys had trotted by unnoticed since the interval began, to whom he had indicated the pair. They would serve as witnesses in case the matter came to the law-courts and evidence. For eight months that fine of £20 had rankled, and Bilêl meant to recover it through Maurice without resort to outside help.

"Master! Which master?" repeated the inspector, and leaning from his horse he laid a heavy gloved hand upon Ramzy's shoulder. "The truth, O Copt!"

"But Mahmud Bilêl, O Excellency! Who else is master?" The man was beginning to grow scared. He feared the dark eyes so unblinkingly set on his own like those of a bird of prey, piercing and probing into the very dregs of his brain.

"Be not afraid! I seek not you!" came the precise tones all knew so well. Then with a nod and a smile he cantered away in the wind and the sunlight.

"What did you wait for?" as he caught up the trudging engineer.

The man looked up, grave and polite. "For you, Mr. Harvey! Have you had a satisfactory talk?" Like Ramzy, he was afraid of that steady glance, but he persisted in his insolence, keeping an eye the while upon the

riding-crop held easily across the saddle-bow. But its owner's mind was not turned to blows.

"So that's how you thought of paying yourself back the fine you got last July! And interest as well!" Maurice paused and for one moment Bilèl conceived that the riding-crop would rise and fall in a stinging slash upon his shoulders, though its position was never changed. Maurice did a more disconcerting thing that could not be dodged. He was white with anger, yet he smiled. "I shall report you again, Bilêl, for this and also for taking my name in vain!"

The Egyptian withdrew his hand from his trouser-pocket, in it a half sheet of crumpled notepaper. Impersonally he began to read aloud the opening sentences of Lucy's letter which Maurice had received that morning! "Darling Maurice," sounded in the staccato English peculiar to the Eastern tongue, and though Maurice's face gave no sign the pony bounded with a snort and drove Bilêl down the little embankment into a muddy ditch, whence he scrambled, rather undignified, with a scowling face and his yellow buttoned boots the worse for water. But he still held the letter, ostentatiously.

"Sorry, Bilêl!" said Maurice, carelessly. "I didn't mean the pony to do that. I was a trifle surprised at your trying such a game as this. Get on to the works as fast as you can!" gathering up his reins.

The engineer had expected him to ask, perhaps plead, for the letter. He was disappointed of half his pleasure. "Shall you report me now?" he called after the receding horseman. "Shall you report me now?"

Maurice, cantering away, never turned his head. He might not have heard. Bilêl started to walk with his wet

feet, cursing the Englishman oriental-fashion from remote ancestry down to equally distant posterity. The Englishman's honour was in his hand and yet the contemned Frank bore himself as a ruler, thus enforcing his spurious mastership. All the afternoon Bilêl expected negotiation either by person or writing, but none came, though he ran across Maurice more than once in the sunshine and the dust. The inspector seemed to have forgotten all about the morning's clash. Towards five o'clock work ceased, the men were paid off and with the approach of chill dusk the irrigation officers withdrew to their quarters, the big dahabeah. Still the north wind blew, lashing the water up along the side of the boat and howling eerily in the rigging. To-night were neither moon nor stars. Clouds rolled heavily, threatening rain, and Maurice and O'Callaghan went into the stern saloon of the dahabeah and donned their overcoats. After seeing that all the glass windows were tight shut O'Callaghan lit the American stove, that smelled abominably because the servant never cleaned it and sat down to wait for tea.

"I'm off to Cairo," said Maurice from his cabin, hearing the Irishman's voice asking what on earth he was doing so long below.

"Again?" came the response.

"Must," said Maurice, emerging with a handbag. "Must."

O'Callaghan's sky-blue eyes were directed to the ceiling. His head was thrown back in his chair and his chin seemed more than usually pointed. "Work or—play?" said he, and though he never moved he noted that no reply was forthcoming.

"Look after Nick for me!" as he took his hat. The dog gazed from one to the other and whining low made for his master. "No, no!" said Maurice, and the terrier understood. He crept under O'Callaghan's chair, whence the Irishman hauled him to cuddle his black and tan ears.

"How can you bear to leave him behind so often?" came the soft Irish accents. "This chap's more of a chum to me than you are, Harvey! Good-bye and good luck to your venture! Ah, now, sure that's good?" as the tea-tray appeared in the hands of the velvet-shod suffragi.

"Ana mush hena bi l asha (I am not here for dinner)," remarked Maurice to the man, in whose eyes for a fleeting instant there stood a flicker of comprehension. Maurice saw it and remembered the copy of his letter, remembered too how the flap of the envelope seemed very lightly stuck—steamed open most likely by this very man! O'Callaghan saw it and sat up under the impulse of a Celtic intuition.

"Don't go, Harvey! 'Twill be ill for you to go!" he urged.

"I must," said Maurice again. "I'll be back tomorrow morning," and he went, closing the saloon door after him.

O'Callaghan buried his face in the wire hair on Nick's shoulders. He lifted it sharply as a speech of the suffragi struck his ear. The man said it was not bad for Maurice to go thus. Intrigue hurt no one.

"Khalas (It is finished)!" said the Irishman briefly, his hand on the teapot, and the servant withdrew.

"Nickie lad!" observed O'Callaghan, turning the

dog off his knees on to the floor, "something is wrong about your master, but I'm dashed if we'll talk it over with any—native, or any white for that matter! We'll back him up, I think, if we're asked any questions."

Nine o'clock saw Maurice move composedly out of the tram terminus at Mena and tramp up the slope toward the gate of the hotel. The wind had died down and now a quiet night cast its spell over the earth. Masses of cloud lay pale in contrast to the fathomless space where hung the blazing stars. The Pyramids were, too, great triangles of opaque blackness. Maurice heard voices speak far and near with never a soul to own them and camels grunted over his head with never a shadow to be seen. How to reach Lucy he could not think without making his presence known to the others. However, fortune favoured him.

She was on the steps with Edith, admiring the peace of the night, and Capper and Borrodaile, whom Mrs. Brayton had asked to dinner, were there too. All were clearly outlined against the electric lights behind them and they were facing the massive pile built by Cheops of immortal name. Capper had just made a whimsical remark upon the architectural taste of that nebulous monarch when Lucy, who had been standing a little apart, said she felt like having a short stroll.

"Don't come, any of you," she added. "I'll be quite safe," and twisting her scarf around her head she was out in the drive before her companions spoke. Then none moved to follow her. Capper, ever since he arrived to find Lucy and Edith in apparently amiable conjunction, had been pondering on the intricacies of feminine intercourse, and Borrodaile was fully engrossed in ex-

tracting reticent Miss Brayton's opinions of the world in general, which he found interested him deeply. But Capper was not too absorbed to keep a thoughtful eye upon Lucy as she faded into the inky darkness. A figure advancing towards her caught his attention, a figure unmistakably English. Very like Harvey, neat and springy and—yes, without doubt Harvey's walk! Capper specialized in walks. He knew his friends afar off by their gaits.

They met, vague shadows under the eucalyptus trees, and turned along the private road toward the desert past the hotel. Prearranged, thought Capper.

"Trifle chilly out here, isn't it, Miss Brayton?" remarked the policeman, watching her. No, she had not seen them. Her profile was directed dreamily to the Pyramid plateau. "I vote for the band inside!"

Edith woke up and began to look about.

"Mrs. Jameson wanted a little walk, she said," explained Capper, still watching. The light fell clear and full on the girl's face. She suspected nothing. "Mrs. Jameson will come in when she wants to," added Capper.

Satisfied and not a little relieved to be rid of her incubus, Edith assented and they went inside where the string band was discoursing sweet melody that pulsed softly into every corner. Borrodaile discovered Mrs. Brayton behind a newspaper she had taken from the reading-room, as far from the band as possible, and there the trio settled to discuss the possibilities of aviation. The conversation was chiefly sustained by Edith and Borrodaile. Mrs. Brayton was entirely taken up by the political leader in her week-old paper, and Capper was wondering what on earth those two people outside could

find to talk about so long. But he kept his own counsel.

The warning-bell for the tram rang and the two gentlemen rose to depart. Then Mrs. Brayton began to wonder where Lucy might be.

"Oh, in her room by this time," answered Capper easily, "slumbering sweetly, you may be sure! I think I saw her come in some while ago." He had not, but there were other staircases besides the big one that faced them where they had sat all the evening. He knew Mena House well, and hoped that what he said might be true.

For some reason Edith found it impossible even to think of sleep. Her pulses fairly hammered to-night quite without cause, so after she had bathed her hot face, having bidden her mother good night, she drew apart the window curtains and threw up noiselessly the wire gauze sash—mosquitos that night were very few and far between—and sat down to lean her arms upon the sill and look out upon the cloudy darkness. Depression possessed her, body and soul, and yet she knew not why.

Her corner stood out above at right angles to the interminable wall with its perspective of countless windows all alive. A sand slope began a yard beneath them and mounted up and up past her window to the very feet of the stars.

A native sprawled, a mere blot, on this slope, where by day black scarab beetles rolled their nests and burrowed tirelessly under the golden sand in the sun. Now over all reigned a magic silence like a hovering spirit, and far away the faint howling of jackals only deepened the stillness. The native apparently grew tired of playing with whatever was in his hands, got up and resettled

himself as if for slumber at the foot of the wall, native-fashion, under the windows.

How long she sat quiet Edith never knew, but all at once she was roused from her reverie by the slight sound of a window being opened somewhere. It seemed close by and the native thought so, too, for he started and crouched like a wild animal below the level of the sills. Then, looking warily up at each as he passed, he ran swiftly along, perhaps upon all fours, till he came to one and there paused, still crouched low.

Edith's attention was now thoroughly alive and she watched with all the concentration of which she was capable. His every movement was so full of purpose and so sinister.

Now from a window—she could not see which—a man slipped astride of the sill on his way out. Then he vaulted over facing the corner whence Edith looked down from the shadows, and at that instant the native sprang at him and a light flashed upon his face, a bull's-eye lantern and—Heavens above!—it was the face of Maurice Harvey! With a stifled word she did not catch he struck the lantern down and it fell upon the sand and went out. Edith heard the thud of blows, a quick suppressed cry, and then the native subsided in a confused heap on the sand under the window.

Maurice stooped, to pick up something that had fallen, a knife, for it clinked as he laid it on the sill.

"You are hurt!" whispered Lucy's voice, clearly audible to Edith in the stillness. "Come in! Some one may have heard!"

"I must catch the last tram!" he replied hurriedly. "This chap's not damaged more than a whack on the

jaw! Help me in! I can't have my hand bleeding all over the place!"

And Edith saw Lucy assist him with difficulty into the room again, saw him fling the knife near the figure on the sand which had begun to stir already and heard the window shut. Then silence again. No one had wakened. The girl watched the window, fascinated as if by a great light until her eyeballs ached, but it remained lifeless and discreet. The native sat up, felt himself all over, and then struggled to his feet, collected his scattered possessions and departed to the brow of the hill where, however, he paused. Many times he had looked back, and at length he decided to await developments. So there he squatted down for a vigil, probably in obedience to previous orders.

How would Maurice get away? The sentinel at the top of the slope was as clearly visible from their window as from hers, and Maurice could not walk through the hotel in morning dress alone outward bound, having come in unobserved. Moreover, his hand was hurt and that badly, and—stealthily she scratched a match and looked at her watch—time was getting short. There were barely three minutes before the tram left and any other mode of escape—a carriage or telephoned-for taxi—at this hour of the night was too noticeable, far too noticeable. Oh, what madness! Why did he come?

Edith in her anguish had gone into the passage and shut in her unconscious parent almost without knowing what she did. Where she stood she could see down the vista like a tunnel on which Lucy's door opened. All the lights were turned on in the corridors, a horrible dazzling line whichever way she looked. Something

must be done and that soon. Distaste for a probable brawl held her back from going to help them till the passing of the minutes assured her that some circumstance had gone wrong. Had he lost so much blood he had not now strength enough to get away? It was this thought that nerved her at last to go down to the room.

As she came near Lucy opened the door and looked out. When her eyes fell upon Edith her face fairly lit with hate. She was fully dressed.

"What are you here for?" she snarled.

Edith answered, set and calm: "I was at our window. I saw it all, Lucy. He must still be here. I've come to help him get away."

"*I wouldn't doubt you!*"

The girl's hazel eyes blazed as she brushed by the other in the doorway, but the taunt drew none of her fire. To close the door and pull the window-curtains she left to Lucy's own sense, contenting herself with the silent compulsion of turning on the light as she passed the switch, indifferent now to the watching eyes out on the sand slope.

CHAPTER XIII

MAURICE was standing at the wash-table with one sleeve rolled up and his hand deep in the basin full of cold water.

He looked round when the all-revealing light sprang up about him, but he showed no surprise and even a possible tinge of relief. It seemed quite natural to him that Edith should come in.

"Will you *never* leave us alone?" said Lucy in uncontrollable rage.

But he spoke to the girl as if he had not heard, nay, if Lucy were not there.

"Can you make this stop bleeding?"

She went up to him then and glanced into the basin. The water was crimson.

"'Tisn't as much blood as you'd think," he said, "but I daren't use any more water. This will be difficult enough to get rid of."

"I'll see to that!" she rejoined. He must have all the water he needed. As for getting rid of the traces she would manage that later. Had Lucy any bandages or camphorated cream? When deficiency was revealed, Edith went for her own. She always kept them handy. They often came in unexpectedly useful, she remarked grimly.

With primitive passionate joy she saw how helpless Lucy was, faced with a practical ordeal. She sat on the sofa across the room, sickened at the sight of blood. Maurice shuddered once or twice as Edith deftly washed his wound, but he stood his ground manfully. All the fingers were cut across to the bone. He had evidently caught hold of the blade, which had turned in his hand, cutting deep into his palm as well.

"You will be lucky," said Edith as she finished strapping and snipping, "if you keep the use of your hand. The motive muscles are cut most likely. Will you see a doctor about it?" She heard herself speaking thus practically as if in a dream hearing some one else speak.

"You are the most capable woman I ever met!" was Maurice's fervent acknowledgment.

Lucy looked up at this with lively interest, but she had nothing to say and wisely held her peace.

"The tram has gone," she contributed, with a glance at the clock to make sure.

Edith looked searchingly at Maurice. He had evidently lost a good deal of vitality. Sitting on a chair, he was leaning his head back against the wall, and his face was very white indeed. At that moment he cared nothing whether he went or stayed, only wished the throb in his slung arm would cease. And he knew it had only just begun!

Now Edith began to scheme how to get him away. It was nine miles to Cairo, the last tram had gone and the horses of the hotel were wanted for other things than night escapades. Moreover, Maurice must go without publicity.

"I leave it to you!" said Lucy with her remote, faintly sarcastic smile. "You are so used to planning!"

Edith decided to order a taxi to be telephoned for to take her mother, who must suddenly grow very ill, to Cairo. When it came she herself would be on the steps waiting for Mrs. Brayton, who would not appear, but Lucy would run out to say she was much better and quite refused to go, whereupon the taxi would be dismissed and Maurice, down at the gate, having meantime slipped out undiscovered, would engage the vacant taxi and drive comfortably back to the metropolis. This was the best plan—the only one. Maurice accepted it, sore, because of Lucy's treatment of Edith and his own inevitable loss of the girl's sympathy.

"I must return you your scarf," he said. It was his sling hastily fashioned from a dark silk neckerchief which Edith had kept for many years, the only thing that would serve the purpose. Nothing of Lucy's could be used. It had, moreover, a masculine look.

Then she gave him the only expression of her opinion of all that had happened that she allowed to escape: "I won't have it back!"

Both Lucy and Maurice looked at her quickly and saw from her cold proud face that what she said was the least of what she meant.

"Good-bye, Mr. Harvey."

In the hazel eyes which after the first short moment of contact he dared not meet there stood a little scorching flame of scorn that forced its way through the chink between the closed doors of her pride.

"Oh, hurry!" said Lucy with bowed head.

"I'll come back," remarked the girl on her way out, "when the taxi is here."

Without further attention to either she shut the door upon them and drew a long breath of relief before she walked down to the office on her errand of subterfuge.

Until the motor came she remained in her own room listening to her mother's untroubled breathing, her ears alert to catch the first approaching footstep so as to avoid a knock at the door, and trying not to wonder in the intervals whatever Maurice and Lucy were talking about now. She had left them sitting dejected and silent each on a chair, with the width of the room between them. Would they be so still when she returned? Faintly her sense of humour stirred within her.

At last the footsteps came, the under-porter announced the taxi's arrival, and after his withdrawal and a decent interval during which she might be supposed to be arguing with a recalcitrant parent, she sought her hat, coat, gloves and bag softly in the dark and went out to Lucy's room again. The blaze of light within made her almost stagger. Yes, they had apparently not moved and her inward demon smiled, but whether they had spoken who could tell? It was, at all events, no business of hers and she donned her outgoing garments at the toilet-glass in silence.

"It's about time for me to creep out," said Maurice in an even voice that by its very expressionlessness accentuated his unspoken loathing of his situation.

No answer; only Lucy looked up for a moment, then returned to her former listless attitude.

Edith went downstairs. One or two switches in the hall were turned on, but they only served to reveal the gloom

beyond the arches. Edith counted her own tapping footfalls down the marble escalade and across the floor, while the throb of the motor outside jarred upon her ears. Then she sat down to wait until Lucy should come running. Such an interminable time went by that she thought again some hitch must have occurred. The sleepy porter came and asked if Mrs. Brayton might need help.

"Mrs. Jameson is with her," was the reply, and at that moment Lucy did come, running and properly flushed.

The scene was gone through and the angry taxi driver dismissed and then Lucy followed Edith. The girl never turned nor slackened, but at the top of the stairs Lucy ran a step or two and overtook her.

"I can't sleep alone!" said she. "Stay with me to-night, Edith! I—I'm very unhappy!"

"So am I," came the quiet rejoinder. "Good night."

"Come with me! I'm afraid!" and in her extremity Lucy caught Edith's hand and pulled towards the passage that led to her room. They had come to the parting of the ways.

The girl freed herself with a jerk and turned away without a word.

"How cruel you are!" cried the woman with a sob. "We couldn't help it!"

Edith faced about at that with the fierceness of a tigress. "*You* could! A woman always can! It's the men who can't! And now go to your room! Haven't you had enough shame and subterfuge yet?"

Lucy cowered away. "Don't tell George!" she implored.

"If he asks I'll tell," answered Edith, and Lucy knew

against that tone there was no appeal. "But I'll do my best not to meet him. I don't ever want to meet either of you again!" and turning she went into the quiet dark room and shut the door.

The plan succeeded without a hitch, save that at the gate as he waited Maurice was accosted in the gloom by a vaguely familiar voice which he presently remembered to belong to Ahmed the nephew of Kahiri Pasha. The fellow was pressingly solicitous about the wounded hand, which was however hidden in Edith's dark-coloured scarf, and he all but caused Maurice to miss the taxi. Only as the motor spun like a locomotive along the dark unlit roads it occurred to the inspector to reflect upon how Kahiri came to know of the disabled arm, for it was very discreetly slung. A little snake of fear wormed its way into his heart and coiled itself there. He had come to bid good-bye to Lucy—and now——! and he lay back in the cushioned tonneau and cursed himself bitterly.

Nick gave his master a riotous greeting on his reappearance aboard the dahabeah and so did O'Callaghan, whose welcome was combined however with a calculating scrutiny that did not miss tell-tale effects.

"We've been scraping along as usual," he remarked, pushing a box of cigarettes across the saloon table. "Bilêl and Rasul don't hit it off. Rasul accused the other of shirking and I found he had been. I supported Rasul. He seemed to think I wouldn't. Don't you?"

"When he's in the right," briefly, lighting up.

The briefness was such that it attracted O'Callaghan's sky-blue eyes from the litter of reports on the table before

him. "He's a decent chap. The other's untrustworthy."

"Is he? There's talk about promoting him."

"Him?" and the Irishman's gaze steadied to a swerveless stare. Maurice met it, but not comfortably. His companion was beginning to suspect things. The eyes, however, returned to the arrears of reports without further comment. "These things are your work—or are you going out this morning?"

Maurice wanted to face Bibêl as soon as possible and get the meeting over with a calm front. His hand was an awkward piece of evidence. The Irishman tied his sling for him and the inspector went his way with Nick at his heels.

When he rode up to the earthworks Bilêl saluted with a ready smile. He showed much concern—too much—about the bandaged hand, and elicited bare facts: a cut with a knife, mere clumsiness; and then he saw fit to be arch about the scarf which Maurice still wore. "Surely a lady's favour, *hein*?" and Bilêl watched narrowly for signs of confusion.

"You know best!" drawled Maurice. "Look at that level there! Nothing near deep enough and yet they're at the next section already. How's that?"

Rasul, the second engineer, put in: "I said it was not correct depth, sir!" looking full at Bilêl, who was measuring the trench. It was lacking twenty-three centimetres.

"I have been so much alone!" he apologized, with veiled insolence.

"I have been here, sir, all the time you have been away!" said Rasul.

"Have you? Well, not quite so much bickering, please!" and the first grade district engineer departed about his business, and Maurice found himself breathing freer once the man's back was turned. No other incident took place that morning.

When the two inspectors met at luncheon on the dahabeah O'Callaghan opened the question of the pumps. Ahmed, immaculate as ever in white gown and red sash and tarbush, was silently waiting on them. Maurice sent him on an errand to find a non-existent soda syphon and then told O'Callaghan not to speak of the work before the suffragi, who, he had just heard (he said), had been opening his letters and taking copies of the contents. Yet he pretended not to know any English.

The other gasped and sat up straight. "When did he do that?"

Maurice was not explicit, but said enough to prove his point.

O'Callaghan's blue eyes blazed and his brogue waxed strong. "Yesterday, and he's still here! By the powers, man, ye take ut calmly! Tax him with it and kick him out now! Soon it'll be too late!"

But Maurice said nothing. To tax him would bring the text of Lucy's letter inevitably into the light of day, and that was impossible.

The Irishman waited for a response, keenly watching his friend, and when he saw none was forthcoming he added quietly—

"Harvey, old man, if you are mixed up in something fishy, can I help?"

A long pause, while Maurice, fascinated, watched a fly's gyrations over the centre of the table.

"No, you can't," he said at last and began playing with his bread. It was a tremendous admission to make, but he knew that no denial would now serve. He threw himself on O'Callaghan's mercy.

"*I'm sorry!*" said the Irishman when Ahmed, having served dessert, withdrew.

"Don't give me away until—others do," Maurice answered without looking at him.

"Sure I won't!" was the fervent response, with the unspoken but understood reservation that O'Callaghan could not allow himself to be dragged into another man's trouble.

"Well, I dismiss Ahmed this afternoon," he remarked, rising from table.

That would do no good, said Maurice, and at this his colleague gave him another lightning glance. Worse and worse! He laid a hand on Maurice's arm, his keen face full of anxiety—

"Won't it blow over if you go on leave?"

"No." Pause. "I asked for the Soudan and Bonner told me not to shirk. I daren't ask again."

The Irishman whistled. This thing, whatever it was, was going to be a smasher for some one, and to judge by Maurice's face—well, no use to anticipate coming events. However, one thing he could do if Maurice could not—see to the suffragi's removal and tell the cook to mention at the native café he frequented in Hellal the fact that a suffragi was wanted on the dahabeah. The letters must indeed be of a compromising nature! But if he was asked questions O'Callaghan resolved to show density compared to which the bogs of his ancestral home would be as glass.

Meantime he desired Maurice's advice in the matter of a pump wrongfully used. Maurice was not at all surprised to learn that Ramzy had been drawing water on to his land without regard to rotations or claims of any kind. "I told him he was out of his turn," said the Irishman, "and he said Bilêl had told him you wouldn't say anything about it."

"Wouldn't I?" and Maurice sat up.

"I said I would—and that's one of the things I sat on Bilêl for."

"Good job too!" ratified Maurice. "Can't have nonsense at any price!"

"Do you mean that?" keenly.

The other met his gaze full and square.

"Yes. At any price."

"By George!" said O'Callaghan. "I don't know what all this means, but one thing I do see, and that is you've got some pluck!"

Maurice smiled drearily. He was deadly afraid.

"I wish I could write some of those reports," he said, "but I shan't be able to write, I fancy, for some time to come!"

"No," responded O'Callaghan. "Perhaps it's just as well!"

Maurice looked across at him swiftly, but he was scribbling hard.

CHAPTER XIV

LUCY did not appear at breakfast the morning after her lonesome vigil, and Edith consumed her meal in solitary thankfulness. Her imagination failed her when she reviewed the possible and impossible subjects of conversation had Lucy appeared. She herself was content to let unpleasant things remain submerged once they were dealt with and sunk. Not so Lucy, she was well aware. Lucy was a born nag.

"I never slept a wink all night!" declared Mrs. Brayton with some annoyance when Edith returned to remove her mother's breakfast tray.

The girl looked back in her mind's eye upon the dark burning thought-packed hours she herself had tossed through to the accompaniment of invariably regular breathing from the other side of the room, but she forbore a smile and contented herself with—

"How's the arthritis this morning?"

It was not good. In fact Mrs. Brayton was displeased with life in general, and as Edith listened to her grumbles a hope dawned that it might be possible to get away from this place which had become horrible to her since the day before.

"Too damp?" she took up. "Well, Helouan is dry. Why not go there, mother dear?"

So it was settled that as soon as ever Lucy went home

on her husband's return the two ladies would pack their baggage and flit away to establish themselves in the desert-girt town at the foot of the Mokattam hills.

Four days went by uneventfully, save for the aviation week. It was an odd sight to see monoplanes and biplanes whir roaring between the two Pyramids and soar over the head of the time-scarred Sphinx, but Lucy viewed all with the morose impassivity of a Red Indian. She was just civil and no more.

On the fifth day there came a letter for Edith bearing the postmark of Alexandria. It found her alone on the covered terrace and in the superscription she recognized the handwriting of George Jameson. Commendably short and all-embracing, it ran—

"Dear Miss Brayton,—

"Will you please be on the spot when I come to fetch my wife to-morrow evening? I must see you.

"With kindest regards to your mother and yourself,

"Yours sincerely,

"G. A. Jameson."

As Edith sat, re-creasing the fold in the sheet of paper and regarding it with absent face and chaotic feelings, a bevy of American friends surrounded her and begged her to show them a Bedouin encampment full of young camels which on her rides alone—"unsociable rides," they said—she had mentioned having encountered. They reckoned up on their slim fingers and found that the morrow was the only day they could *possibly* go. Was it convenient to her?

"Oh, quite!" she responded with a smile. "It's a

long way, you know. We must take a picnic set-out and be prepared to come late for dinner!"

They accepted the proposal with rapture, and thus Edith arranged not to be "on the spot" when Mr. Jameson came to collect his possessions. By this letter she saw he had a question to ask her which she did not see how to answer. She was not inclined to lie, nor would evasion avail her anything, nor did she feel like open speech. Silence on the other hand would be more damning than either alternative. He had her trapped, clever fellow! Right or wrong she decided on the line of complete avoidance, and in this spirit sat down and wrote to him "c/o the Irrigation Department" that she had an engagement on the morrow with friends which would entirely prevent the meeting he asked for. She guessed that that would only stave him off for a little while, for she remembered his fiery hair and his prominent jaw. But if he were staved off, something might happen to make him change his mind. Occasionally second thoughts prevail. Otherwise, if he intended to question her he would find a way to catch her, without doubt.

He did intend, and wrote by return of post that he would be glad if she would name a day convenient to herself.

She replied that as her mother was not well and they were about to move from Giza to Helouan she would be very busy for some time. When she had a free day she would let him know. This merely had the effect of bringing him at once, for the same day her letter reached him, she saw him at half-past five in the evening walk into the terrace at Mena, search around with his eyes,

find her and come straight as the crow flies. He bared his head but did not offer his hand and looked about him distastefully at the fashionable bustle and chatter going on.

"This won't do," he said. "Come out on the desert, Miss Brayton. I must have quiet to ask you about my wife." He marked her stiffening intention not to go, and added: "I shall only think worse of her if you don't come."

Then she rose and strolled at his side down the steps and out on the sun-baked road towards the Pyramids. He said not a word while they breasted the slope and crossed the stony plateau with its streaks of blue strata intersected with rivulets of sand. He only spoke to snap at one or two prowling dragomen who accosted them, and at last led the way up the mound of a mastaba tomb that faced the big Pyramid bathed in the hot evening glow. There he seemed satisfied. He looked this way and that. No one was in earshot. The dominating mass of the Cheops' memorial stood before them, and ridge upon ridge the desert stretched behind.

Edith sat down and idly took up a scrap of red and black pottery from some ancient sacrificial rite. She would not begin, at any rate. Let him make his own opening!

He had no hesitation.

Turning his eyes upon her face like gimlets, he said—

"Tell me what happened while my wife was here."

"Why do you think anything happened?" she parried steadily, her gaze upon the glow already fading on the Pyramid's sloping side.

"Because of this," and he handed to her a slip of paper

from which a few words sprang to life at her first glance.

Edith's face turned scarlet from neck to brow, but she met his eyes full when she looked up.

"Do you believe anonymous accusations?" she asked slowly.

He tore the slip to tatters with deliberation before he replied. "I despise myself for it, but in this case—" and he paused—"I had suspicions before. It is all working like poison. Give me the antidote—if you can. I won't speak to Lucy of it!"

She said nothing and stared at the myriad worn blocks of stone mounting tier upon tier before her into the crown of the skies. The red glow had faded. Hard and grey now, the mountainous cone stood outlined against the changing amethyst sky. A Bedouin on a camel rode by at a jog-trot, looked up and bade them good night. His burnous flapped in the cool wind.

"You must use your own antidote—your generosity," she said.

At this he bowed his face in his hands.

"So I've lost her—I've lost her!" he mourned.

Edith had to stoop to catch the muffled words, and a great pity wrung her heart for this man, stricken it mattered not whether by his own fault or some one else's. Who can say what incident may rouse love or give it a death-blow? An incident so small as possibly to pass unnoted by the giver.

"Not lost!" she said, "no, not lost yet! Nothing is ever lost quite while life lasts. Death is the only real barrier. You've not lost her yet! Wait and see! Don't act in a hurry." Into her quiet tones there had crept a note of intensity. "Above all, don't do that!"

She forced herself to be quiet, though her pulse was racing. She was thinking of the divorce suit it was in Jameson's power to bring, of Maurice and his career and of Lucy, whom she believed to be a true woman, that is, a clinging parasite unable to stand alone.

"If you only have the sense to wait," she said, "I believe Lucy will turn back to you!"

"Why do you think that?" he asked with eyes fixed on her, hungry for the crumbs of comfort she strewed.

"I couldn't say," she answered. "I believe it very strongly."

"You mean she's shallow—she has no roots!" he returned bitterly. "Yes, I know all that! But roots may come!" a sudden hopeful addition.

"They may," agreed Edith, "and if they do, well——" She paused and looked at him. His face was alive and eager.

He smiled for the first time that afternoon. "Well, why, it'll be all right!"

"Then you *will* wait?" she cried.

Yes, he would, and he volunteered further that he would do nothing without letting her know.

"Thank you," she said gravely, while her heart leapt. There was a chance for Maurice yet!

"How long have you known of it?" he went on, his mind full of groping readjustments. Under her calm exterior he never realized the panting jumble of feelings as she made careful explanations of what she knew, neither too much nor too little. "And don't you blame them?" he asked at the end with almost child-like surprise.

With a smile that hurt him he knew not why, she told

him she blamed no one for anything. No single act stood alone; it was but a link in the chain of Nature's evolution. Had *he* nothing to reproach himself with? She had too many bitter failures written on the tablets of her memory ever to consider herself fit to be a judge.

"You are a marvel!" said he at last. "I always thought you took things so easily!"

"Live and learn!" she rejoined airily, but it was hard work to save her smile from trembling into tears. Philosophy prevailed, however, and as she and Jameson parted at the hotel gates she rejoiced that her secret was safe at least from his ken. Lucy might wish to backbite, but Maurice's name would scarcely be a congenial topic. Moreover, conversation between them now was probably strictly limited.

Edith, feeling almost happy, walked along the interminable corridors towards her room with a bouquet of letters in her hand culled from the porter's desk in passing. While her mother read her mail the girl wondered whether life would be more peaceful at Helouan or whether fresh disasters were hovering there to fall upon her defenceless head. Surely all the unpleasant things that could happen to her had already happened! At any rate her mother's grumbles would abate when the sulphur springs had begun their work.

One of the letters came from Mrs. Tregarthen at Assouan to tell of dear Olive's recovery from her *quondam* sufferings.

In the fulness of motherly joy she announced that darling Olive would soon be quite free again. The brute —thus she cheerfully termed her erstwhile son-in-law— had made no objection to consular proceedings for be-

loved Olive's release, provided he received his sop. The consul had said that unless his utterly illegal demand was acceded to Bilêl might cause a great deal of inconvenience, and advised her to abandon Olive's property. This she had done. Mr. Roy Sims-Evans, "that frail and charming lad whom you may remember," was staying in their hotel. He was occupied painting a wonderful picture of Philae by moonlight, which he was kind enough to exhibit to friends on rare occasions. Olive and Doris, the dear girls, were great friends with him. He seemed to have influential connexions.

Edith laughed. "Instead of bothering me once a week to marry him I suppose he's at Olive now!" she remarked.

Her mother looked up. "Did he ever ask you?" she asked. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Not of enough importance, mother dear!" was the easy answer. "It was only the yapping of puppydom! Roy will grow up presently!"

"Not important enough!" growled Mrs. Brayton. "I'd like to know what you do consider important enough to tell me! Nothing at all, it seems! Or are some things so important they can't be told?"

She hit the nail on the head that time, but the girl never blenched.

"I must be a very dull companion for you, mother," she answered. It was impossible to make known her pain regarding Maurice, for her mother had a heavy touch and her wounds were very sore.

"Yes, we are pretty dull!" came the uncomplimentary response, and the matron continued sorting her letters. Despite complaint, the arthritis in her hands

was evidently not severe, for she tore open the envelopes easily, which she had often hesitated to do in the past.

Edith packed in preparation for departure with method but without energy. She felt fagged.

Not another word was heard of Maurice, whose excursions to Cairo altogether ceased. She longed to write and ask him whether his hand had been disabled, as she feared, but any communication would look like condonement, and that was out of the question. Nor could she ask any one she met who knew him for tidings of his hurt, because she knew not how he spoke of it, if at all. Of the Jamesons came neither sight nor sound to Helouan, which agreeable suburb the Braytons rarely left. Three months went by. One day there was a race-meeting and the Bonners came down to lunch. Lady Bonner had a piece of news: an addition to the Jamesons' household was expected some time hence and "they" seemed very pleased about it.

"Well?" added Lady Bonner with an eye upon Edith's musing face. "You have not said a word yet!"

"Oh, I am delighted! That goes without saying!" was the somewhat hasty reply. "Mr. Jameson will be very glad!"

"H'm!" drily. "Mrs. Jameson isn't!" Her private opinion of Lucy was not complimentary, but she never said so. She was far from well now at any rate and her husband meant to send her home soon to escape the hot weather. "Have you seen Maurice Harvey lately?"

Was it chance that Maurice's and Lucy's names came in juxtaposition? Edith looked up with studied indifference and a cool: "No, why do you ask?"

"Oh, I just wondered," was the baffling response.

He was very quiet just now. Some mysterious damage to his right hand prevented his writing any reports. His companion, Mr. O'Callaghan, did the correspondence for both, but of course (with a smile) he *received* letters all right.

"I don't write to him," said the girl, unsmiling. "I don't think I ever shall——" and she broke off short ere adding the "again" that had come up to her lips.

They were alone at a corner of the grand stand fence with the blazing white hills before their eyes and the scorching sun upon their backs.

"If you did you'd have something to write about!" grimly spoke the matron.

"What, Aunt Leila?"

"Donald isn't pleased with him. There's continual trouble and friction in his district. For a time he was always running off to Cairo, then he smartened up a bit, and now he's slacker than ever! Ah, they're off!" and she strained her eyes towards the distant starting gate where there was a flash of rainbow colours and a scurry of dust. "I thought he might have gone like this on account of you, but—" and she paused with a penetrating glance before which the girl was silent—"but now I don't think so!"

No answer. Edith could frame nothing to say that would be a good parry. Yet the remark with its masterful inflection required an answer.

"Why do you say you will never write to him? What has happened between you?"

Edith, goaded to exasperation, broke out in quite a breeze of wrath. She did not know why her aunt, and uncle too, so persistently connected her with Maurice's

doings! He was his own master just as she was hers. And she turned to watch the racing ponies as they thundered past the judges' box by which she stood. Borrodaile was riding. He came in third. This ascertained, Edith faced her aunt, who read in her silent gaze that though the girl had not been able to foil attack entirely further assault would be futile. She had been forced to admit she knew something, but more than that she would never yield. Lady Bonner recognized the Brayton determination in her niece and smiled with grim satisfaction. She wisely dropped the subject and they strolled round towards the paddock to meet and tease Borrodaile upon his only moderate success. Coming in at the gate as they passed was a young man in grey tweeds with very blue eyes and a very pointed chin. One glance was enough for him—he had no time to lose—and without seeming to hurry he rapidly caught up the two ladies.

"Ah, Lady Bonner!" he exclaimed. "A pleasant surprise! I thought you'd be here to-day, since you're so fond of racing!"

"Mr. O'Callaghan, wherever did you spring from?" and she smilingly shook his outstreched hand.

"From the train," replied he, "and I'm due back in it in an hour and a half! That leaves me half an hour here!" and he fell into step beside her, madly wondering what he was to do. Edith Brayton he had long known by sight, and she was the person he had come to see as emissary from Maurice. A lot to say of private nature and great importance, half an hour to say it in and Lady Bonner in possession of the field!

"You are making a short visit!" remarked Edith as

Borrodaile came up, his racing colours just showing in the neck of his covert coat. Desperation inspired the Irishman and in a swift second he had possesed himself of Edith and the other two were walking ahead.

"We haven't been introduced," he said pleasantly. "An introduction is but an accident, anyway! D'you mind?"

She laughed. His brogue was agreeable and his methods appealed to her sense of humour. Was he merely an impulsive boy or was there necessity behind his quick action? She had observed his manœuvre to get her alone. She looked at his face, which disposed of the boy-theory. Here was a very high degree of concentration, yet he walked beside her for some seconds without speech.

"Half an hour seems scarcely worth coming for, does it?" she asked, to facilitate matters perhaps. They had stopped in the middle of the sandy paddock.

He neither smiled nor looked at her, indeed she believed him immersed in his own thoughts till he spoke, still with lowered eyes.

"It's all I've got, Miss Brayton," raising his eyes to her face to search it long and thoroughly without a vestige of personal feeling. "In your opinion what's the difference between love and flirtation?"

"Well, really!" and Edith began to laugh. There was no reflection of her merriment in his face, so she stopped and looked at him seriously. "Where do you come from?" she said then.

"I am on the Hellal Circle. I live sometimes on a dahabeah."

"Oh!" was all she said; but the pause between them

was eloquent now of many things. He had come to seek her by intention then. Half an hour's converse was worth seven hours' railway travel.

"How is Mr. Harvey?" she asked, wondering what this man had come to say to her. This question must draw him, she thought.

It did not. He repeated his initial question and in it now she perceived lay much more than at first appeared. Good Heavens, was he asking her if—if she loved Maurice? Or did he wish to tell her what she already knew?

"Metaphysics don't interest me," she responded. "How is Mr. Harvey?"

He looked about him at the sheeted ponies, busy grooms and strolling rank and fashion before he answered briefly—

"He's why I came."

CHAPTER XV

THE ponies were cantering past the grand stand towards the starting gate for the next race. His eye upon each one as horse and rider fluttered by, he went on—

"Of course, if you are not interested in metaphysics—I always heard you were! I am!—you won't care to hear of a hypothetical case I rather wanted to put before you." He looked at her doubtfully yet expectantly as he concluded.

"You mean no hypothetical case," she returned quietly, and her heart grew heavy. "You mean Mr. Harvey. Say on. Do you come from him?"

"I do," and he gave the first smile she had seen upon him. His initial question was answered already. She would listen to him now; from what particular set of motives O'Callaghan did not greatly care. Sufficient that she believed in love enough to listen.

"We'll have no names," he began, with a glance at his wristlet-watch. "'Tis easier so. Call it a hypothesis."

She assented with a silent bow.

"Suppose," went on the Irishman rapidly, "a man has got into natives' power unavoidably——"

"How so?" came the query, swift and low.

"Take it for granted!" he pressed on. "—unavoidably, so deep that he daren't even dismiss a spying servant or snub a cheeky assistant unless a—a friend does it for him. Miss Brayton, isn't such a man to be pited?"

"Certainly, very much," she answered, and then looked him full in the face. "Well?"

"Suppose he finds that no letter passes to or from him without being read by goodness knows how many persons. Suppose he has a lady friend who writes to him intimately—kind and friendly, of course, but we all know how natives regard these things!" airily taking her sympathy as assured to him. "And he wishes her to know her letters are no longer safe. Would he be justified, Miss Brayton, in asking another generous friend who knows the lady well to go to her and persuade her to discontinue the correspondence for a time?"

She caught her breath and made no answer, with her eyes unseeing on the Mokattam plateaux whose strata cut the horizon sharply as battlements. Gymkhâna and races were all forgotten. She stood stock still while he watched her. Then she said—

"Why not have written a letter? A friend could have posted it in Cairo. No danger *there?*"

Twelve minutes were left. He abandoned the hypothetical. It wasted too much time. "Miss Brayton, believe me, he is in a very tight place. He is so nervous now that he won't write any letters, refused even to let me carry an unsigned note for her in case it was lost. Miss Brayton, he clings to you as a last hope and that a forlorn one, for he knows you—know everything. But for that very reason he must turn to you. You are the

only person who *can* talk to the lady! Will you fail him?"

She drew a deep breath and he held his own, awaiting the verdict. It came.

"Very well," and he breathed free again. "You may tell him I shall succeed. One thing more tell him," and she stared O'Callaghan between the eyes: "I don't want his thanks!"

"Ah, poor devil, be sorry for him!" he interceded. "If you saw him as I do, every day——! Time's up and I've lots to say yet! Walk with me to the gate?"

She did, and as they went he threw sidelights on the situation at Hellal. Maurice was far from well. His hand had not healed and was very painful—a sort of blood-poisoning. He *could* write left-handed with slow trouble, had indeed once written a message in this manner and then would not let his friend take it and burned it there and then.

"How far are you in his confidence?" asked Edith at the gate.

"To the extent of what I see," was the answer. O'Callaghan raised his hat, buttoned his coat and ran in a halo of dust towards the setting sun. His train was shrieking in the station. Would he catch it? Presumably he did, as had he lost it he would have come back.

At the enclosure gate Edith turned to find her uncle at her elbow, gazing amazed after the rapidly receding form of his subordinate.

"We seem in a hurry!" he remarked, turning a reflective regard upon the girl. "Hadn't time to say how-do to any one but you! How's that, niece Edith?"

She met his look fearlessly. "He had a message for me from Maurice Harvey," she said. "I think he is changing his mind."

"Regarding you, you mean?" bluntly.

"Perhaps," very quietly.

"How do you mean? That he wants you or—he doesn't?" No answer. She was digging holes in the ground with the point of her parasol. "Last year," resumed Sir Donald, "you gave me to understand that had he proposed to you you would have accepted him. Now I gather from your aunt Leila that you've refused him! The two points of view seem contradictory, don't they?"

She allowed clear seconds to elapse ere she replied, and her pause somehow made his bluff speech seem rough to him. Perhaps here was an easy explanation ready-made of her lack of intercourse with Maurice. She did not contradict her uncle. After all, what did it matter now?

"My mind has changed and stuck," she said. "His is in process of evolution."

A grunt. "Glad to hear it!"

She walked back to the grand stand with him in silence, both their minds centred upon the same point—Maurice—but from widely divergent angles. Bonner was preoccupied with what to do with him, Edith with what he had done to her. He had imposed on her the most unpleasant and difficult task she had ever faced in her life. He must indeed be in a tight place to turn to her for aid! The past months of silence now were eloquent of struggle, and the love in her heart shuddered as she thought of his friend's words: "In the power of na-

tives—a spying servant—cheeky inferior——" and then "a forlorn hope, for he knows you know everything!" Where would it end? Ill, too. And through her resentful abhorrence of scenes the motherly tenderness of women for the weak came and bade her not blame him, but shoulder his burden and help him along.

"What leave does Mr. Harvey get this year?" she asked diplomatically of her uncle when they had almost reached the group where Lady Bonner stood in gay converse with some people whom Edith was too absorbed to recognize at the moment.

"He doesn't get any," growled her uncle.

"Not short leave—four or five weeks? He ought to get his hand attended to. Something is wrong with it, I hear," she said.

"That's his own affair. He may get leave—if he applies at once."

"Does he know that?"

"Don't know!"

She stopped, forcing him to stop too and face her. "Uncle, you don't seem kind to some of your assistants!" she bantered, watchful as well, however.

"*Kind!*" he exploded, and then recovered himself with an effort. "Young lady, some departmental matters don't scream for kindness!"

Then they were fallen upon with affection by the entire Tregarthen tribe, of which the most prominent member had apparently quite forgotten her former marked coldness towards the Bonners.

"What a long time you were gone, Edith!" commented her mother rather acidly.

"Did you want me?" asked the girl at once.

"M—no, but we've stayed longer than we usually do. The sun's getting low and Dr. Bayley told me my arthritis——"

"Oh, well, I'm sorry!" came instant apology. "We'd better go now then!"

Borrodaile, who had changed into ordinary clothes, looked at Mrs. Brayton to see if her mind was made up to go and, seeing that it was, decided to accompany them. He wished to talk with Miss Brayton and resented O'Callaghan's interference, as he inwardly called it. When the Tregarthen party joined in the homeward promenade, however, he felt better. Private converse with one out of a group of two is hopeless, but in a company of ten is more than possible. In this company it was not, for the Tregarthens had too much to say. Roy Sims-Evans was on the outskirts of the group with the end of a little sketchbook protruding from his pocket, and he presently approached Borrodaile's companion. She had walked very soberly beside the railway inspector, but no sooner did the young artist come within range than she opened a spirited attack—

"Isn't your thoughtful patron restive yet?"

Roy laughed. "His candle of appreciation still burns if lesser lights have snuffed out! Miss Brayton, your sands of liberty are running low!"

"Oh, no, they're not!" she fended gaily, but he was dogged. As soon as his pictures had found their way to "the line" she must redeem her word or take the consequences—a breach of promise suit. All this he delivered with Puritanic countenance, and Borrodaile regarded him with unconcealed disgust. How could she deign to joke with such a long-haired cub?

"What's this I hear of moonlight strolls at Philae?" she retorted. "You don't know your own mind, Roy! Because I'm in white serge to-day like Doris Tregarthen my name's Brayton! You must be more observant!"

"Who's been telling tales out of school?" growled he. "Somebody's a gossip!"

Edith asked after Olive and he instantly fired off long dissertations upon her pluck and how she was not yet legally free though she had resumed her maiden name. She was still very frail and tired, but her recovery was only a matter of time. Mrs. Tregarthen had had a lasting lesson, he thought, that Eastern domestic life does not fuse well with the Western temperament.

"Fuses too much, you mean!" Thus Borrodaile, with some impatience.

To his rage Roy paid him no attention. "Awful pity, the whole thing!" he said.

"Doesn't he think of her at all?" queried Edith.

"That brute, you mean? No, never a thought! Please God he won't!" piously spoke the young man.

"Amen!" she added. "See, she's looking about for you, isn't she?"

He jumped to attention. "I believe she is!" and away he went.

Edith laughed as she and gloomy Borrodaile looked after him. "So that's the lie of the land!" said she. "Well, they're about the same age and it should be easy to live with Roy after such an experiment as she's gone through!"

He caught at this. "You believe it's very difficult then for a man and a woman to shake down together? Is it if they love each other?"

The dust of a string of passing carriages had time to settle while he waited for her reply. He saw her mind was taken up with formulating her theories. Silence with her by no means suggested vacuity, and what she had to say after such careful consideration would be of some importance as a key to her views. They interested Borrodaile.

"There are so many different kinds of love. Is any one of them flawless? Can any one say: I will love this man or this woman no matter what he or she might do? Some loves begin like a flame and die down to the white ash of indifference. Others begin quite ordinarily and burn up till they devour both the beloved and the lover in some great crime. When you see a married couple insisting how happy they are to all the world what do you think? And when you see a silent pair what do you think then? I believe it is to be no happier than when you are single. What a speech I've made!" and she glanced at him sideways, a little uncomfortable.

He was tramping thoughtfully along, looking at the ground. She hoped he would not look up till her eyes, now unaccountably full of tears, had cleared. He did not.

"What I make out from your 'speech,' Miss Brayton, is that you are very unhappy. I don't think those views of yours are permanent. But whether they are or not," he never ceased looking at the rough white ground, "I hope that any time you feel inclined to make the experiment you'll remember me! My love may not be flawless, but according to you your own might not be either. I'd do my very best to make you happy in spite of your doubts of such a possibility!" and suddenly he

lifted his eyes and met hers, still bright from tears. "I'd do anything I could to help you!"

She raised would-be amused eyebrows. "Who says I'm in any trouble?" Then she answered him gravely and gently. The responsibility of such an undertaking as marriage was more than she would face at present. Any one who was married could wreck not only his or her own happiness but that of so many others. Those who were alone had less scope for action.

Borrodaile heard her out, much more intently than he appeared to do, but: "Count on me at any time!" was all he said at the end. He was by now aware that somewhere were wheels within wheels at work and she was unwillingly involved among them. Already he knew she was beyond his sphere and would never return, wait as he may.

They caught up the vanguard at the railway crossing, for a dilatory train was rumbling in. Olive Tregarthen was tired with the walk from the racecourse and sat on a sandstone rock fanning herself with a little white ostrich fan. Pale, cool and sweet, she drooped in the glare under her white lace parasol like a wilting flower.

"Just the woman for an artist!" remarked Borrodaile with some satisfaction. "Those fatuous chaps want anaemic lilies! A woman with character'd be wasted on them!"

Edith laughed, but when he glanced at her there was no expression on her face as of laughter. She was wondering afresh how on earth she was going to conduct that horrible interview with Lucy and make her believe the truth. Moreover, must she write to Maurice and tell

him to apply for leave at once if he wanted any? For he was not well and might improve with a month or so in Switzerland. Should she allow her private prejudices to interpose themselves in questions of health?

CHAPTER XVI

DURING the long day, doubled by suspense, of O'Callaghan's absence Maurice went about the canal-works as usual. His scrutiny and orders proceeded with mechanical precision while his mind everlastingly revolved the question of what response Edith would make to his really outrageous demand. That it was outrageous he never forgot for a moment, but Lucy had to be stopped, and the girl was the only person to whom it was possible to turn. In spite of his knowledge of her deep disapproval he still half-expected her to consent. It was imposing a great strain upon her generosity, but he was somehow aware that she was capable of unusual things, which made him hope that some day she might relent and even speak to him again.

When four o'clock came and he released the men, weariness fell upon him like a millstone. How he managed to stand by the pay-table and watch each man receive his daily wage from the unreliable, weasel-faced Maltese clerk he never knew, but for his official peace of mind he stood it out. But then the ride (of only a mile or two) back to the dahabeah rendered him nearly insensible. He slid from his horse without seeing the sais come forward, and once in his chair on the shaded deck he had not energy enough left for even a smoke. He

merely lay and waited, nursing his throbbing hand, dully a-wonder why he was so tired.

Suddenly he became aware of some one moving before him, probably wanting him to do something, and he glanced up with a malediction looking out of his eyes that when he saw who was there instantly dived back, leaving expressionless reserve in its place. Ramzy stood dressed in his best—yellow satin gown, red and gold belt, claret-coloured cloth toga, and tasselled cap, with his little son, an exact replica of himself in miniature, behind him.

"May thy day be happy, ya moufettish (inspector)!" he began, and introduced his son, who thereupon ranged himself beside his father holding on to a sinewy paternal hand hidden within its long, mandarin-like cuff. "If the Presence wills I withdraw, but——"

"Speak on!" broke in Maurice irritably. "Finish thy new demand and then get you gone!" He unconsciously softened under the great black velvet eyes of the child set unblinking on him.

"That has been done upon me which is not justice," proceeded the father. "Perchance the Presence that is thy brother hath told thee what he hath ordered me?"

"No!" shortly. "He knoweth well the heart of the Hakouma (Government)!" An argument, that Maurice no sooner advanced than he knew should never have been made. In saying O'Callaghan was acting according to orders he admitted that he himself was not and was aware of it.

"But thou, O moufettish!" said the man, "thou art my friend! Thou art just!"

Maurice saw that the moment was come for severance

of the octopus tentacles that clutched and cramped him so long. What an alternative! He did not hesitate a moment. To go behind O'Callaghan or—and an expedient was born and matured rapidly in his mind. It was a quick way too to be rid of an unpleasant interview, galling his weary senses almost beyond endurance.

"Justice is the friend of all," he said in the manner natives love. "O Ramzy, it is just that thy losses should be made good. What is the amount of thy debt to Bilêl Effendi?"

Under the grave eyes of the child spectator the Copt copiously told his account, and when it was done could scarcely believe his ears to hear—

"I will pay thy debt—thirty-five ghiné (pounds), sayest thou?" Maurice, already halfway to the companion ladder, glanced round for confirmation and the child nodded seriously. Ramzy gazed unresponsive. Then the inspector went below to look for his chequebook in his desk. Writing his name left-handed was a slow affair, but he persevered, driven by the desire for immediate peace. It never occurred to him that the Bank might not recognize his new signature. This was the first cheque he had written since his right hand had become useless.

"Take this to my bank and it will bring thee money," said Maurice as he handed it to the waiting farmer, patient where he had left him on the poop. "Art satisfied?"

Ramzy saluted and his baby son saluted also gravely, copying his father. "Yea, justice has been done, may the Presence live for ever! My lips are still."

Maurice had resettled himself in his chair. Now he

looked up, arrested, and his breath stopped for an instant. "Why should thy lips be still?" he queried easily, hiding his discomposure. "Is there cause for talk?"

"If there be cause the Presence knows it," came the indefinite answer, gravely given. "If there be none the Presence knows that also."

Maurice hoped that his quick glance and momentary start passed unnoticed. He quietly dismissed the pair: "May thy night be happy, moubarek (blessed one)!"

The sun had sunk and the tremendous afterglow had dyed the flat-topped hills opposite a hot flame-colour. Below on the bank stood date-palms and tamarisks among the clover fields, all vivid emerald in the quick-changing air. Quietly the river flowed along on its sandy bed as the sky turned to violet, then to indigo and lastly to velvet studded with diamond stars.

"It's all right!" cried O'Callaghan, bounding up the poop ladder. Not a flicker of an eyelid greeted the news he brought. "She's grand!" and the ambassador flung himself luxuriously in a long chair whence he looked at the motionless figure, black and upright against the smoking lamp behind him. The cicalas shrilled on the bank close by and Maurice remembered his swim with Nick close upon a year ago. Nick was curled beneath his chair now.

"Want dinner?" Maurice managed to get out at last in the confusion of his bottomless relief. O'Callaghan shook his head. There had been a dining-car on his train.

"Is that all ye've got to say to me?" laughed the Irishman tenderly, and in the resultant silence the Nile lapped softly on the mud-flat under the dahabeah's stern

and O'Callaghan studied the lighted windows of one or two native houses that loomed high up on the bank, mysterious enough now but ridiculous by day with garish painted fronts and stucco grapes and fauns. When he looked round Maurice spoke at once—

"How did she take it?"

"Like a brick!" was the answer, but then enthusiasm seemed to cool. Harvey felt it and shot forth a quick glance which compelled the Irishman to reluctant speech. He repeated Edith's message and saw his companion draw a sharp breath and then smile faintly as men do at the touch of a mortal bullet.

The smoking lamp caught Maurice's eyes and his tidy soul revolted at the floating smuts. He rose and turned down the wick. No yellow disc glowed now on the peaked awning above the lamp chimney.

"Tell me every word she said," enjoined he, looking at his bandaged hand, as he came back to his deck chair, "every word!"

And the Irishman told, to a mute figure still as the dead in the dim lamplight. One incident only he kept to himself—that in the station happening to feel a stealthy hand in his trouser-pocket he caught its wrist and turned to see whose it was. The new dahabeah suffragi's alarmed eyes met his at close quarters. He flung away the man's hand and jumped into the train with a single word: "Fool!" Bashîa was looking for any paper that might have been handy. O'Callaghan would have laughed had he not been angry. So there was reason after all in Maurice's fears!

When the recital was over Maurice said low—

"How soon will she go, though?"

The Irishman had no doubts on the point. As soon as ever she could. She knew the case was most urgent or —here O'Callaghan's words failed, but Maurice bitterly filled in the missing links—

"Or I wouldn't have asked such a monstrous thing of her—no! The—other hates her," he added after a pause.

His hearer's head came up at this. "She didn't tell me that!" he whispered. "And yet she'll do it to get you out of a mess! By Jove, Harvey, you have all the luck!"

Maurice moved restlessly. "Have I?" he said, and silence reigned once more while the cicalas chorused over the breezeless land. He was beginning to realize that O'Callaghan had not asked a single question nor uttered a comment when entrusted with that singular message he had so loyally carried; his failure of speech just now was his first involuntary criticism and Maurice felt it more than he dreamed was possible.

"No, no!" he said, "she wouldn't go to-night! Jameson would be there——" He started.

So did the younger man. It was the first time a name had come to his ear and he recoiled in horror as at a sudden presentation of a naked skeleton at close quarters after a sojourn in its decently covered presence. After his first smothered exclamation the young man bit his lip as he took in this—to him—new circumstance. It brought the skeleton so close!

The other smiled bitterly. "It's different to you now there are names in it! I've half given myself away, so I may as well do it thoroughly!"

"Don't say anything you may regret!" quickly said

the other. He never wishes to hear again the laugh that his words provoked.

"*Regret!* My God!"

"We'll talk of something else if you don't mind!" instantly subjoined the Irishman. All this turgid passion on the part of his usually cool companion jarred very unpleasantly upon him, and he seized upon a "shop" subject by which to climb away from it. "Something else interests me more!" he said. And that was why Rasul, the engineer who had replaced Ahmed Kahiri, transferred the year before, was always bringing summons in the local courts of justice against sundry small landowners for taking more water than they should from the canals. Maurice, now his composed self, declared the fellow was a bore. That month he had brought no less than twenty-one cases!

"His measurements are always out!" said Maurice. "If he wants to keep his post they'll have to tally! Bonner told him so!"

O'Callaghan rolled his head over on the back of his chair to look at his colleague. "Whenever I've seen him measure anything I've noticed his measurement was invariably correct," he stated quietly. "What happened to his reports then?"

"They had to be altered," shortly answered Maurice.

The Irishman sat bolt upright and his chin seemed visibly to elongate as his eyes searched the shadow that shrouded Maurice where he lay in his chair. "Who altered them—you?" The words shot out like stones.

"I allowed it to be done. No, Bilêl did it. My dear fellow, what else could you do? To let them pass would be to make a break in the chain that would rouse endless

comment—if this is correct all the former years' and years' work is false, if it isn't why—why—*ad infinitum!* You know as well as I do that one must shut one's eyes! Lie down! It's too hot to argue!"

But the slight white-clad form remained upright. "Who gets the water that's let through by these faked tallies?" he demanded, quiet but insistent.

"Section three, chiefly."

"And of them Ramzy gets nearly all. I saw his pump working yesterday out of hours. I disconnected it myself and told him not to do it again. He tried to make me a present that evening! What has he given you?"

Maurice crossed his knees. "No need to be insulting, Jim," he answered softly, flicking away a singing mosquito. "I've taken nothing from him."

"Forgive me, Harvey! I was hasty!" instantly apologized the younger man, feeling he had been hasty indeed. "But this isn't a pleasant job and I can't be mixed up in it, whatever you see fit to do. It must stop." He paused a moment. No effect. He went on: "Ramzy says he owes you money. How's that?"

"He doesn't. It's Bilêl, who's been lending to him under cover of my name——"

"WHAT!!!"

"Don't shout!" and calmly Maurice told Ramzy's story: withered crops resulting from delayed pump-permit and consequent loan from the engineer to buy fresh seed.

"But that's a mere trifle—five or six pounds!" cried O'Callaghan. "What does that matter?" He was dumbfounded at the revelations that followed. Bilêl, enraged at his previous year's fine for negligence, in-

tended to make up the amount through Ramzy by charging outrageous interest.

"I—I can't refuse to—to doctor those reports, you—you understand!" and for the first time hot shame dyed Harvey's face and neck. In the dark, of course, O'Callaghan could not see that, but he heard afresh the surge of agitation in the usually unhurried voice.

"You mean—you can't!—that he—*he*—knows about—about——"

For the second time this evening words failed him. He saw the dark head between him and the lamp nod—once.

"I," came the even strained voice, "I—must let this go on for five months. Then——"

"Five months! Why? Why five?"

"She couldn't stand the row there'd be until—until five or six months from now. Don't you *see*, man?" Irritation throbbed in his tone, but he was quite motionless.

O'Callaghan did not, however. This brought him to his feet excitedly to pace to and fro for a minute thinking. Then he broke out—

"'Fraid she's got to stand it, old man!"

"I tell you she can't!" Now Maurice moved. He stormed, argued and pleaded while his colleague stood doggedly firm. Those months would be the flood months of the year when no shortage occurs, urged Harvey (remembering all the time to keep his voice low for fear of eavesdropping on the companion ladder). When the shortage came in February he would answer all charges.

To this proposal he met stern reply. The shortage of

this season had to be dealt with first. "I can't be a party to muddling the reports for the whole year!" was O'Callaghan's stand. "If Bonner came down on us now what would you look like and where'd I be? Go and tell him all about it—that's your only way out!" That Maurice of all men should do this was exquisitely painful to him. That Maurice should beg and argue thus—oh, it would have been unthinkable! He felt as if in a nightmare dream.

"I can't!" said the culprit chokingly, and dropped back in his chair. "It's not only her! Any shock might be murder—for both!"

O'Callaghan staggered and bit his thin lips hard. Now in a blinding flash he understood. "Good Lord!" he groaned. "I can't allow this to go on—and yet—and yet—Harvey, can't you trust the Chief? Can't you tell him and let him find a way out?"

"No, I can't!" snapped Maurice, savage with pain, and O'Callaghan was silent awhile.

He did not know what to do. Impossible to let the irregularities go on—equally impossible to upset Mrs. Jameson! He rose at last to lean on the rail and stare across the broad blackness of the ever-murmuring waters, waiting until his friend behind him should speak. He had a long time to wait. In fact not until next morning did Maurice take up the threads again. O'Callaghan retired below before the tension was broken either by word or look. What he had heard to-night had shaken his world to its foundations and he tossed restlessly for many an hour before sleep came to him. Once he heard stumbling footfalls past his door—Maurice going to bed. A match and his watch told O'Callaghan that three hours

had gone by. Nick pattered sniffing in his master's wake. The dog slept on the foot of Maurice's cot when he was allowed there. He evidently thought he stood a good chance to-night.

In the morning cool as the two men's eyes met across the breakfast-table the combat began anew. Tension was too great for any morning greetings.

"Give me time," said Maurice, just as if the other had spoken, "and I'll make it right!"

"You can't make it right!" said O'Callaghan, watching through a window-port a telegraph runner in his ragged khâki uniform pedalling his ancient cycle along the bank. "It can only get worse. It's an impossible situation. You must see that. You must tell."

Maurice, too, noticed the cyclist messenger. Following him with reflective glance he said quietly—

"Oh, yes, I've seen it! Bonner's way out would be to chuck me. He doesn't back us up much. I dare say I deserve it—myself!" and he laughed faintly. "I want to tide it over, though, so if the smash must—Hallo, that chap's coming down to us!" He rose quickly, napkin in hand, and went along the corridor towards the outer deck. But the telegram was for O'Callaghan. He resumed his breakfast, but his hand shook so that some of his coffee spilled from his cup on the cloth.

The Irishman read the message through twice and then passed it over. "Concerns you!" he remarked with the ghost of a smile.

Maurice read with a countenance as unresponsive as wood.

"O'Callaghan. Hellal. Unless short leave applied for immediately, none will be granted.—BRAYTON."

"She got that out of the Chief last night!" guessed the Celt. He looked at the time the telegram was handed in. Yes, overnight. She must have talked with the Chief directly after his own flight to catch his train, and sent off this message—*for* Maurice though not *to* him—hoping it would get there before the offices closed for the night.

Maurice forgot his breakfast. He fingered the flimsy sheet with enigmatic face. At one moment the other thought he was going to smile, but at last he handed back the slip of paper with the smile still in embryo.

"She thinks of me though she won't write to me!" he exulted, looking at his companion with triumph in his eyes, all shadowed with dread as they were. "Man alive, I believe that woman does care for me!"

O'Callaghan's mouth opened and he let his knife and fork down with unheeded clatter as he stared in amazement. "You say that when at this moment at your behest she may be giving your message to the other woman you—oh, it's incredible! Harvey, you must be mad!"

"I came to know finally what she was to me," said Maurice deliberately, watched by the younger man in a sort of fascinated horror, "just when—just when she came to know all about me."

O'Callaghan, his hands clasped about his knee, sat wrapped in angry bewilderment at the situation that compassed himself and his friend it seemed inextricably. Ramzy had sniggered in his face the day before and Bilêl had disobeyed his orders till pulled up short. These things could not be tolerated. What would become of his friend and fellow-worker was the conundrum that exercised him most, for he knew Maurice liked his work

and his life and that if dismissed the Service he must inevitably "go under," a fate to be shuddered at. Yet he saw no way out. Dismissal must come, and his be the hand to bring it.

"I'm more sorry than I can say!" broke from him presently, and his drawn face attested it. "I suppose you couldn't help it, once it was fairly started."

Maurice took that up, miserably. "No, once it was started! My folly was—well, never mind!" Then he hesitated and finally said: "There's something I forgot to tell you last night. Ramzy came on board and I gave him a cheque for the whole amount to clear him from Bilêl."

O'Callaghan burst out—

"Cheque—you gave him a cheque—*you didn't?* Why, man, that's the one thing to make him think there's something in it! That would look like a bribe! Oh, you fool! You fool!"

The older man slowly raised himself out of his chair and walked round the table to possess himself of the morning paper. "I'm so muddled now I don't know what I've done or not done," he said.

"What did Ramzy say?"

Maurice looked back in his mind and answered that the fellow said he would be silent.

"There you are!" cried O'Callaghan, and began weaving swift plans. At all costs that cheque must be got back. No, that was impossible, for Ramzy would already have hidden it. He would never give it up now. Then a sudden thought struck the young Irishman: how was it signed? He had lent Maurice since his disablement all the small change he had needed,

"Man alive, the bank'll never honour that unless you tell 'em to! They'll say it isn't your signature!"

"I'll write that it is," was the grim response, as Maurice reached for his sun-helmet. Already the air was quivering over the scorched fields and both men were due at their labours, one in the launch, the other on horseback.

"I'll write for ye! Ye need only sign ut!" said the Celt, his brogue very pronounced, the only sign of emotion that he gave. "Will I wire in your name asking for leave while you're gone?"

Maurice, smiling involuntarily at the Irish bull, assented and set his foot upon the plank to go ashore when the boy—for O'Callaghan was little more—followed him.

"The water's gone!" he said. "How could ye explain that! Harvey, ye must tell the Chief or—or I will!" in a whisper with wide eyes.

Maurice thought of Bonner's extenuating attitude towards young Egypt and went up the plank without reply. Nick squirmed between his legs, raced across and chased a pariah dog with furious outcry up the slope and out of sight. Then he returned to hang six inches of blood-red tongue out of his mouth and pant victoriously. Maurice faced about. O'Callaghan was still at the gangway gazing after him with an anxious face.

"Ye will tell him, won't ye?" he called wistfully.

"Oh, yes! I'll tell him!" Maurice called back across the water, then walked slowly up the bank and disappeared.

O'Callaghan wondered how soon he would tell. His faith in the world's integrity had received a rude shock,

CHAPTER XVII

EDITH spent bitter hours of reflection but no plan of action presented itself as feasible, and she found herself wondering in the end what had impelled her overnight to accept a burden that had really nothing to do with her. However, she had accepted it, so she would not yield. Her heart beat quicker than usual as she went downstairs, leaving her mother in bed happy with letters and a newspaper.

In no cheerful frame of mind she made her frugal morning meal with her sketching paraphernalia beside her, which she had been careful to bring with her as a plausible excuse to any one who was inquisitive about so early an expedition. Of course confidence on such a matter was impossible, and she wished to get the interview over together with its possible consequences, before there was any risk of Jameson's return for lunch. Edith detested subterfuge and this little deception added gloom to her already glum outlook. She had promised that she would succeed, but how?

As she thus cogitated with one eye on the clock through the glass swing-door who should come in but Roy, evidently looking for her. Neat and tasteful and even more curly-headed than ever, he came straight to her.

"Now I've got you!" said he. "I want you to

come and pose this morning for me with Olive Tregarthen as two Egyptian beauties! Don't say you won't! I've got the background all ready painted! Now don't be churlish!" On her refusal he scrutinized her carefully. "You're worried!" he announced, and immediately became solicitous: "Can't get your berths from Cook at the time you want? That it?" Then as she did not answer he spied her sketching satchel. "Best panacea for human woe—painting! Doctors ought to force it on would-be suicides! I bow to the exigencies of your case, Miss Brayton! To-morrow morning would suit me equally well." Sobriety had quelled his gay mood. As he stood watching her his eyes were all the graver now for their contrasting sparkle a few moments before. "What is it, Miss Brayton? Won't you tell me what troubles you?"

"Nothing anybody can help, Roy," she answered, rising, her few needs satisfied. "One thing you can do for me: if any one asks where I've gone this morning say I'm sketching."

He whistled. The light from one of the many dining-room windows fell across her forehead and showed plain the lines of trouble there.

"I will," he responded, and she did not refuse his offer to carry her traps to her starting-point. Her line of march led through the well-watered gardens to the railway station. He heard her take her ticket: "Cairo, return."

"You must show me your point of view when you come back!" he said.

She looked up with a smile just hovering about her grave mouth. "I doubt if I'll be able to do that!"

The engine whistled and she added: "Thank you for bringing my paraphernalia! Drape Olive prettily!"

The dusty little corridor train began to move off between the mounds of gravel that hide all but the sky and telegraph lines for the first mile. Now Edith realized with a jump she was actually on her unpalatable errand. It was like waking from a dream. The heaps of cream-coloured gravel gave way to wide dry flat water-courses wherein stood a few scraggy camel-thorn bushes trying to keep alive, and Edith leaned back on her voluminous grey veil and tried to smoke a cigarette to occupy her thoughts. The journey seemed interminable, but she wished it longer as her broken-down little victoria rattled across the two bridges to the Giza side of the Nile and pursued the tree-fringed road past the gardens where roses bloomed as if they were in Paradise.

Of the queer, belfried house every blind was down. A native gardener was watering the poinsettias and hybiscus with a leaking hose and vociferation followed when the rickety vehicle ran over its snaky coils.

Edith heard her ring at the bell resound through the house and presently a lad opened the door with a broader grin of white teeth than she conceived to be humanly possible. He was garbed in white skull-cap, ragged blue gown from neck to knee, and white football boots with bare legs.

"I cook!" explained he with mirth. "Suffragi to-day khalas (finished)!" So saying he led her, rubbing his floury hands clean on his galabeah (gown) into the hall where Lucy met her, her arms full of roses from the garden. Against the black tea-gown she wore her face

was pale and strained. About her eyes were traces of tears, and she gazed fixedly at Edith as if confronting a fresh enemy. Her first words betrayed her attitude—

"So it's you, is it? What have you come for?" looking over the La France roses piled high in her arms.

"Won't you send your cook about his work?" suggested Edith quietly, noting the lad's grin expectant of a renewal of the storm that had evidently shaken the household already that morning, not excepting Lucy herself. A sharp word or two in Arabic sent him below stairs again and the two women faced each other silent in the empty, tessellated hall.

Suddenly a quiet step sounded behind Lucy and a uniformed hospital nurse stood on the dining-room threshold. "Good morning!" said she to Edith, looking her over. "Mrs. Jameson is not very well to-day. Hadn't you better come another time?"

Edith drew a long breath. "I am sorry. I am afraid what I have to say won't wait." She felt anew the hopeless nature of her task, so cruelly set her by Maurice. Something of her thought must have appeared in her mobile face, for Lucy tumbled the roses upon the oak table beside her and then leaned with hands gripping the edge of it at each side of her while she stared unblinking at her visitor.

"What do you want?" she said curtly. "You wouldn't come for nothing!"

The nurse intervened again: "Mrs. Jameson must not be excited," and then she withdrew into the dining-room once more, taking with her half the roses to arrange there.

"I know you! You don't come unless you want something!" resumed Lucy bitterly.

"Let me amend that!" came the unruffled suggestion. "I don't come unless I am compelled! Yes, Mrs. Jameson, I have come for a particular reason and you can't be sorrier to see me than I am to find myself here, I assure you——"

"Well?" Lucy cut her short impatiently.

Edith ignored the interruption. "But I have had no choice. I will say what I must and then go. It is a message——"

Lucy started up straight with an inarticulate cry like a tigress, her hands clenched and her blue eyes ablaze. "I know!" she cried. "From Maurice Harvey! To be sure! Ha ha ha!" She laughed with head back-flung, almost beside herself. Then as suddenly the paroxysm stilled. With a half-stagger and a face white as the handkerchief she pressed to her lips she resumed her former position against the table and regarded Edith curiously. "Go on, liar!" she said coolly.

The girl's temper had been at white-heat long ago, but she kept a strong hand upon it. There was every reason in Lucy's point of view, Edith told herself over and over; also her circumstances were scarcely conducive to self-control. Therefore she answered calmly, though the insult had driven a crimson flush over her face that she felt to be scorching her skin. The only sign of anger that she gave was the steady smoulder in the hazel eyes that she directed upon the woman before her.

"Yes, it is from Maurice Harvey," she said. "Mr. O'Callaghan rushed up from Hellal yesterday to tell it to me——"

Lucy caught her breath and leaned forward, her feint of disbelief abandoned, a useless weapon discarded. "Does *he* know——?"

"No. He said to me: Harvey wants the lady to know that her letters are not safe. They are opened and copied in the post. All correspondence must cease."

Cold dread ran shuddering through Lucy's veins for a moment, then the almost demoniac paroxysm broke out again. A fire of frenzy upon her white face, she slowly walked up to Edith with fingers working, and the girl thought she was going to strike. Nevertheless Edith stood her ground and gave back never an inch. When the two women were almost touching and their eyes were but ten inches apart Lucy said—

"If this was true you would bring me a written message from him! Mr. O'Callaghan could have given it to you! Where is it?"

"There is none. He is afraid to write anything. He is watched. Some one tried even in the station to pick Mr. O'Callaghan's pockets, he told me."

Unsteadily the poor trapped woman tried to take this in, but her confused brain refused to admit it and she fell back on the idea that had first gripped her mind.

"You are doing this to separate us, as you've tried many times before! I'm going on writing to him! Do you understand? I'm going on—I'm going on! I don't believe you!" and at last she sat down faint and breathless upon the bent-wood chair at the table.

Edith stood firm, bringing her whole will to bear upon driving home the truth.

"Mrs. Jameson, you *must* believe me! I am not trying to separate you! You stand between me and

Maurice for ever—you know it! I'll do anything you like to prove to you that I am not doing this for myself!"

Lucy was breathing hard and for thirty seconds after Edith had ceased speaking that was the only sound in the silent hall. Past the encircling stairs the skylight let down the softly diluted radiance of the sunshine above and among the dewy roses Edith watched, fascinated, a wee spider spinning his web from petal to petal working away for dear life. To each his labour!

Lucy raised her head and suddenly spoke, but not the thought that had been her intention. "What are you staring at?" she demanded abruptly, and when Edith pointed out the spider she put out a pink-tipped finger and crushed the tiny being out of existence. The girl closed her eyes an instant to shut out the wanton sight and Lucy went on, unheeding, with her primary intention.

"Why are you doing this then?" she demanded.

"To save Maurice, if it can be done," was the answer given with grave simplicity. "That is the only reason that could make me come near you."

A gleam, almost a smile, of triumph brightened Lucy's tear-stained eyes, and she delivered her ultimatum. "If I stop writing to him now will you swear to me you'll never marry him as long as you live?"

Edith's reply came with unhesitating clearness. That had been her own decision long ago. She had no objection to putting it in writing if Lucy wished, but unless she could keep such a document concealed its presence if suddenly discovered might have awkward consequences. Had she thought of that?

Oh, yes, Lucy had thought of everything. She would

keep it safe. "Write it now," she said, trembling with eagerness.

The two women went into Jameson's little study and there after ferreting among the drawers at his desk Lucy produced a half-sheet of notepaper and an envelope. "I'll dictate!" she said.

Edith took up Jameson's pen without a word and sat down, her face calm, but pity and misery surging together in her heart. There was no anger. That had been spent long ago, at the time she first knew of Maurice's predilection for Lucy. Now nothing but contempt stirred in her for any further puny characteristic Lucy might exhibit. If it amused her to have this damaging piece of evidence by her it was no affair of Edith's.

"I, Edith Brayton," set forth Lucy in the sing-song intonation usually adopted by those who dictate, "swear that I shall not marry Maurice Harvey as long as I live, so help me God. Now sign it," and the girl obediently did so, smothering her involuntary flash of humour at the last pious clause.

The last word written Edith sat still, the pen in her hand, whilst Lucy stood over her sealing the blank envelope into which she had pushed the abortive undertaking.

"Now you can go!" said she contemptuously.

The girl rose, noticing as she did so that Lucy's face was as white as the paper she was tucking into the bosom of her gown. She walked steadily enough, however, out into the hall and stood by the table heaped with the dewy roses she had gathered. As she watched Edith take up her gloves and parasol and sketching

things ungovernable fury seized her at the girl's imperturbable demeanour.

"You're going to be very clever!" she sneered suddenly. "That's why you pretend so calmly it doesn't matter to you signing this!" patting the paper where it lay. "You think you have me at a disadvantage now, don't you? You think you'll smooth me down and get him all the same, do you?"

Edith had had enough. She drew herself up, her temper roused at last, though not beyond control. "No!" she cried. "If I wished to marry him nothing on earth could stop me! But I'll take no other woman's leavings! Good-bye!"

Lucy well-nigh shrieked. "You—you——!"

Edith had turned away already, but with the tail of her eye she saw Lucy reel suddenly and sink, clutching the table edge. Quick as lightning she was at the ailing woman's side and being possessed of great strength was able to lift and hold her up.

The nurse had heard Lucy's last cry and came running. She looked at Edith once with dislike as together they bore the fainting woman through the dining-room out upon a roofed verandah. "You'll find water and biscuits in the sideboard!" said she shortly. "The best you can do now is to bring them!"

Without a word Edith sought and brought them. Then she spoke—

"I am sorry, nurse. It had to be said."

"Go, go!" cried Lucy from the deck-chair where she lay spent. She had successfully prevented the nurse from unhooking the front of her gown where lay the letter, but unless Edith was clear away before

her husband came awkward questions might still arise.

Edith was equally anxious to go ; it was far from her wish to make lame conversation with Jameson in his wife's presence. But she was too late to escape entirely. Driving his neat dogcart across the Nile bridge she met him. She would fain have been borne past in her rickety arabiyeh with lowered hat-brim ostensibly on account of the sun, but he pulled up and called her name.

He went to the point at once. "I suppose you've been to see my wife ! How did you find her ? "

"Rather at sixes and sevens," she returned ; "but that's only to be expected——"

"Expected ! " he echoed with suppressed vehemence that lined and aged his face. "*Expected !* I don't think I can bear it much longer ! Sixes and sevens you call it ! Miss Brayton, my life is hell ! By—I won't stand it ! I've told her so ! She's got to behave or I'll divorce her ! " He was shaking like a leaf with the force of his outburst.

Edith looked at the string of rattling native carts taking advantage of the last few minutes ere the bridge was closed for traffic and opened for the crowd of boats to pass. With eyes upturned to the tall delicate spars that slanted already high overhead she said—

"Have you told her that ? "

"Yes, I have ! " defiantly. "She is unbearable ! "

"Mr. Jameson," counselled Edith with grave eyes upon his, "she is only hysterical and that is the result of the burden you have laid upon her. Use your self-control—or send her Home. This will all come right—afterwards. Don't be angry with me, and think over

what I say! Please don't tell her you met me! Suk (Drive on)!" to her Jehu.

His face did not brighten, but he did as she said—he thought deeply and drove away in silence.

"I'm going to book to-day the first berth I can for you to England," said he when he stepped out on the verandah to kiss Lucy as he invariably did on departure and return.

"Why?" she challenged instantly, sitting up, unheeding his caress. "You told me only yesterday you thought I might stay here the summer with you. It wouldn't hurt—it wouldn't hurt—the baby!"

He looked at her under his sandy brows. This was the first approach to affection he had heard from her for months, nay years, and there was something of doubt in his look.

"I've been thinking things over," he went on, "and I believe it would give both of us a rest if you went. God knows I want you!" he broke out uncontrollably, "but this time I'll take no risks! Lucy, I must see that child! Do you understand?" He showed such concentrated determination that shuddering dread tingled coldly through every nerve in her. She knew why he meant to see the child.

"Yes, George!" Her reply was indistinct and very faint. She understood. There was no mistake about that.

"I'm going to send this trained nurse and another with you—to stay with you throughout," he added, "and if necessary I will get a doctor too. It'll be no use to quarrel with them!"

Lucy leaned her head on her hand. "I want a child!"

she whispered. "I'd be better if I had one! George, do you trust me so little?"

He turned away and looked across the avenue of lebec trees in full bloom that flung broadcast their lotus-like perfume on the white-hot air.

"I trusted you once!" he said. He did not say that he loved her still.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT Helouan, by the time Edith arrived there, a dust storm had covered the westward sky over Sakkarah with its browny-grey pall and the air was electric with the presage of coming discomfort. In the hotel doors were being closed despite the great heat, windows darkened and fly-traps set to catch the myriads that swarm indoors on such occasions, scared perhaps by the conditions without. In the hall discussing the weather and the steamers for Europe that were reported to be emptiest, were most of the occupants of the hostelry, and among them Edith saw the Tregarthens and Roy, who was now their inseparable satellite.

"I don't think we can stand this long!" Mrs. Tregarthen was saying as Edith passed by. Catching sight of the girl she called: "Been out? You are heroic in the cause of art!" glancing at the sketching outfit. "Do let us look!"

But Edith fended her off and hurried away, conscious of the elfish gaze of Roy Sims-Evans from his station beside the languid Olive.

Mrs. Brayton was fretful. She admitted it herself and supposed it was the weather. She was writing when her daughter entered the room and continued without lifting her head for some time. Then she sat back

and meditatively regarded the girl, who was changing her dusty costume for something fresher.

"They're saying in the lounge that boats going Home are very full," remarked Edith, fastening her blouse down the back herself with some trouble. Her mother never offered help.

"We are all right!" the matron assured her, and in response to the girl's quick look she added calmly: "We're going next week by the *Batavia*. I took our berths two months ago."

Daughter looked at mother. Mother looked at daughter and saw not the cloud that she expected but a quizzical smile dawn and broaden to a good-humoured laugh.

"Why ever didn't you tell me, mother, when you heard people asking me when we were going?" she said. She pinned her brooch and turned, fresh and unruffled.

Her mother spoke slowly. "Because I didn't wish you to know."

Now she saw a flush of well-controlled anger rise beneath the girl's clear pale skin. "Why?" she asked, quietly.

"Show me your sketchbook," was the response in a tone that grated like a knife on granite.

The girl did not move. "You are right, mother. I took my things as a blind over my real errand."

"And what was that?"

"To carry a message against my will."

"If you didn't wish to carry it, why did you?"

"I was not my own master in the matter. The person I gave it to was not congenial to me."

"Man or woman?"

"Woman."

"And why are you not your own master?"

"I put it badly. I was helping somebody." Then her fortitude broke down under her mother's suspicions. "Oh, mother, don't be angry!" she cried. "I'd tell you all about it if it was my affair, but I'm not free to. I'm not the heroine! It's nothing wrong!"

Her mother smoothed her hand back and forth over the folds of her foulard gown on her knee. "If not, why all this secrecy for so many months?"

Edith blinked several times as if all her mind had been shaken up and remixed. Mrs. Brayton saw the look.

"Why, yes," said the girl composing her thoughts anew into line, "I suppose it *is* wrong, but it's mostly pitiful."

"It always is!" spoke the matron scornfully. "Your sense of proportion seems to be a little out of balance, since you appear to be so surprised at the idea of its being possibly a 'wrong' affair you are mixed up in! *That* is why I am taking you away, and not before it is necessary, I think!"

"I am not the heroine of the story!" said Edith a trifle bitterly again. "Oh, I'll be glad to go! Can't we try some other place next winter? Why not Algiers?"

The angry elder lady was nonplussed for a time by this genuine willingness to concur with her plans. Then she found an interpretation.

"You are in love with the hero, I suppose?"

The pause that followed was too long for denial at the end of it to meet credence. Edith offered none. She

looked up at the yellow foggy sky through the closed window and bowed her head.

"Yes," she answered. Then her head came up with a jerk and an odd gleam shone in her eyes. "But I'll never marry him!" she added with a set mouth as grim as her mother's.

Mrs. Brayton smiled for the first time this morning. "That's the way to talk!" she said, and crossing the room patted her daughter's shoulder with one of her gnarled hands.

Edith tenderly gathered up the poor hands and held them close to her cheek. "Oh, I shall be glad to go, mother!" she murmured, and presently the old hands were wet with her tears. But through her relief the girl never forgot her mother's garrulity. She was wary now. Mrs. Brayton had given her away too often in the past.

"This dust-storm is unlucky," said Edith when her own disturbance was over.

"Why? I don't mind it!" rejoined her mother. "Oh, you mean—of course, I forgot! Young Borrodaile's party, to be sure!" She looked at the whirling wind-borne sand outside the window. "Yes, we'll go. He's probably made his preparations. Pity to disappoint him!"

Edith was not anxious to go, or for that matter to stay away. Borrodaile was a good faithful soul and Capper if at home was not devoid of anecdotal humour.

The drive through the deserted wind-ridden streets to Borrodaile's flat was anything but a joy. However, the two intrepid ladies arrived at last to be met with a chorus of admiration from their two hosts, for Capper

was at home awaiting them also. He was very handsome in uniform.

"There's been no peace in this house since the khamsîn (dust-storm) began!" smiled the policeman lazily. "Borrodaile stuffed his cream cakes into the ice-box so they have no shape left and there are no cold drinks either—you'll have to shut your eyes and trust to Providence that you don't consume flakes of the ice-box lining——"

Borrodaile flung him bodily aside and settled his guests in the most luxurious chairs the bachelor flat could boast. "The fact is," he said solemnly, "Capper's sore because I turned his disgusting beer bottles out of freeze!"

Then Capper from politeness was obliged to make disclaimer, whereat the ladies laughed. So it was a merry little party in spite of the gloomy weather and the all-invading dust—even the room was fogged with it and it blew in moving trails about the draughty polished floor.

"Who sees that that floor is so shining?" asked Edith.

Borrodaile pointed to Capper with the sugar-tongs, and that official assumed a terrible smile. "The only advantage out of many doubtful privileges we enjoy," said the young railway inspector, "from consorting with a member of the local Peelers! We get our work done in double quick time! One of the disadvantages though is that no boy dares to stay long!"

"Come, I only found out one!" said the maligned bimbashi. "And then I didn't say anything about it. He wasn't my servant."

"No, mine!" said Borrodaile sardonically. "I consider that a most unfriendly act. I had to eject the man myself!"

"Do tell us how you did it!" cried the girl, sipping her tea.

"Spare us, Borrodaile!" rejoined Capper. "I was present. You don't know what you ask, Miss Brayton!"

Amid even Mrs. Brayton's mirth the primary host drew a lurid picture of himself all smiles and honey words addressing a quivering malefactor fascinated like a rat by the policeman's reptilian gaze from a corner of the room.

"Do you ever have to deal with Europeans—English people?" asked Mrs. Brayton.

The lengthy policeman instantly sobered. Once or twice he had had to arrest countrymen. "I hope to God," he added very gravely, "I shan't ever have to do it again!" He was amazed at the sudden glance Edith shot him with a flash of—was it fear? in her eyes. But next moment he thought he must have been mistaken, for she was so quietly occupied with her tea.

"What sort of cases do you judge?" she inquired, casually.

"Felony," he answered, and again saw the troubled lightning glance. What was worrying her?

She did not pursue the subject and conversation turned to ships and Home. Borrodaile had early leave this year and had booked that very afternoon on board the *Batavia*. In the office he met Jameson, who also was taking a passage for his wife.

"On our boat?" asked the girl. Only Capper penetrated the veiled distaste with which she awaited the

reply. He had not forgotten the scene in Shepheard's porch, nor the meeting of Lucy and Maurice in the dark that night Borrodaile and he dined with the Braytons out at Mena. Was it possible Miss Brayton's fears were aroused on behalf of Harvey? Any charge concerning him would be fought out, however, in the courts of the Mixed Tribunals.

"One can't escape one's friends!" was Mrs. Brayton's announcement. "I only hope, Edith, that Mrs. Jameson won't bother us!"

"I don't think it likely," replied her daughter searching for more sandwiches. This created a complete diversion, for the search became general eventually to cause an exhibition of well-trained service that both ladies commented on.

"Police supervision!" explained their host, ducking to avoid the well-aimed cigarette that quickly followed his jibe. "By the way," went on Borrodaile, handing the plate of freshly cut sandwiches, "I met Harvey going to Cook's as I was coming away."

"What, will he be on the *Batavia* too? This is getting to be a farce!" cried Mrs. Brayton.

Capper marked that Edith said not a word. Her face was in shadow, but there was not much hilarity in her attitude. The hand wherewith she stirred her cup was steady as a machine.

"I didn't know he was in Cairo," went on the young man. "He didn't tell me how long he was up nor what he was going to do."

"Doesn't seem to have said much!" commented Capper drily. He offered Edith his cigarette case and she took one. He also offered it to Mrs. Brayton.

"A filthy habit!" pronounced she as usual cheerfully, and joined in the laughter her remark provoked.

"You have a charming flat!" she said regarding the neat room in which they were established. "Is it all as delightful as this?" whereupon Borrodaile proceeded to take her round it. They vanished from sight.

Edith sat still, smoking gently and reflecting. Capper also was quiet, but he watched her. He was always watching something, generally in silence. It remained unbroken now. He wished to see how long Edith would follow her train of thought. She was still following it when the others returned. Mrs. Brayton found she had left her pince-nez in one of the rooms and her young host went back to fetch it. As he was going down the corridor past the front door there sounded a ring at the bell. He was opposite the door, so he did not wait for the suffragi to come but opened it himself, and the three listeners in the sitting-room heard a low clear voice say—

"Can you house me for an hour or two? I'm dining at the Club and I don't want to be there long. I've nowhere to go but here."

"By all means, Harvey!" welcomed Borrodaile heartily. "Come in! It's a beastly day and no mistake; the worst for years!"

"Nobody'd be out who didn't have to!" agreed the other voice, the very sound of which sent the blood thrilling through Edith's veins.

"Talk of an angel and you hear his—hoofs!" said Capper.

"Isn't that uncalled-for—as yet?" asked Edith as a

joke, but there was an angry light in her eyes as she looked across at him.

"Who knows?" said her mother placidly.

And then Maurice came in expostulating, propelled by Borrodaile's powerful hands on his shoulders into the room that was filled for him overwhelmingly with Edith's presence.

"Rubbish!" Borrodaile was saying. "What if I do have guests—you can be another! You've just said you had nowhere else to go! You know Mrs. and Miss Brayton—are you afraid of them?" This so nearly hit the mark that Capper held his breath a second. But nothing happened.

Maurice came forward and shook hands left-handed with Mrs. Brayton, who greeted him cordially. Edith said not a word, being occupied in putting out her cigarette. When she spoke with the new arrival Capper noticed she did not offer her hand, nor did Maurice apparently think of it himself. He kicked round a straight-backed chair that faced the window until it did so no longer and then sat on it with his slung arm across his knees.

"Tea, spirits or tobacco?" asked the host. Maurice voted for the comforting weed and then Borrodaile began to wonder what blight had fallen upon his little entertainment. He decided to attack the root of it.

"Harvey," admonished he, "what's the matter with you? Till you came we were all as cheerful as thieves. Now——"

"Very sorry!" said the blighter. "I'll go then," and he rose, suiting action to the word. As he did so the light from the window fell on his face, which was grey.

"You're dead beat!" cried Borrodaile, on his feet in a second. He set his back to the door. "You said you had nowhere else to go till dinner! Sit down, man! Are you going to let him go, ladies, to roam the streets for two hours in this weather?"

Mrs. Brayton gave a determined negative. Maurice looked unobtrusively at Edith, who showed no sign of interest in the debate. She was taking stock of the crocodile skins and weapons that did duty for mural decoration.

"Sit down, Harvey!" upspoke Capper, lazily, watching what was drama to him. Undercurrents were at work here, he plainly saw, and he desired to study them. "Any one would think you had reasons for avoiding present company!"

At that Maurice sat down again and essayed small-talk, but he was either very tired or was embarrassed, for his tongue was halting. Edith, whom Capper chiefly observed, had started at his challenge to the new arrival, but now joined coolly in the conversation. She asked after the wounded hand.

"How did you hurt it? I don't think I heard," she said calmly, and Maurice almost jumped.

"I—I cut it," he replied, "not with a very clean knife, I'm afraid." He raised his helpless member from the sling and examined it ruefully.

"Have you been ill with it?" Edith could not help asking, cruelly as she insisted to herself that it did not matter to her whether he had been ill or not. He looked so wan, and his eyes so large.

"Not exactly ill," he answered; "but O'Callaghan's been awfully good over doing some of my work for me.

Anyhow," he continued, "I think I'll get all right now I can go away."

"Oh!" broke in Borrodaile, "so you've got leave!"

"Yes, dated from to-day, five weeks." He took care not to look at Edith, of whose regard he was painfully aware.

"I wondered what you were down here for; you're such a stranger these days!" was Capper's comment. "What about your room?"

"Well, I was down so seldom I gave it up," explained Maurice, and turned the subject to what he was going to do during his holiday, so as indirectly to tell Edith his plans. "I'm going to a Viennese doctor as soon as I can to get this hand attended to. It'll take up pretty well all my leave, I fancy. I never expected to get any. I'm jolly glad to have it!" and Edith knew he was thanking her for her share in obtaining it, though he never looked at her.

"You won't be in England at all, then?" said Mrs. Brayton. "I supposed we might see you at the Bonners' as we did last year."

"No," said Maurice thoughtfully, "no." He stretched his small white-clad figure at full length in his chair with a sigh of relief, and gave himself up to enjoying the sight, dim in the shuttered darkness, of the girl he loved, displeased though she might be. Despite the uncomfortable thrusts he had received from her and Capper since he came in he rejoiced he had not obeyed his first instinct of flight.

"Shall you be on our boat—the *Batavia*?" asked Edith suddenly. "She sails next week. I am told Mrs. Jameson will be on board." Cheerfully and openly

she made this onslaught and Maurice sat up under the lash that he fancied none but himself perceived.

"Will she?" he returned, utterly indifferent. "No, mine is an Austrian Lloyd and leaves to-morrow."

"So soon?" said Mrs. Brayton politely, and then reminded her daughter it was time to start for their train to Helouan if they meant to catch it.

On opening the shutters with caution Borrodaile found the yellow dust-laden atmosphere had cleared to a crystal evening with a cool north breeze blowing.

"I am glad you are coming on our ship, Mr. Borrodaile!" said Edith. She spoke low in the confusion of departure to the railway inspector, not intending Maurice to hear. But he was making way for her to pass through the chairs and heard. Also he saw Borrodaile's quick look of pleasure with a stab of jealous pain at his heart.

Her eyes met his with grave reserve in them. She passed on with a mere bow, and he realized afresh how far back he had already slipped from her level. So far that he might not even speak with her on matters of vital import. He was bitterly aware she decreed it so. But he could not guess that for many a day she would remember the dumb appeal in his dark eyes as she passed out after her mother.

"Any one know where Jameson is?" inquired Maurice in the vague pause ere the three men decided what they would do next, now the guests were gone.

"Most likely at the Club," answered Borrodaile. "Want him badly?"

Harvey inhaled quietly. "No, thanks. I just thought I'd like to know where he was."

Capper gave the recumbent Maurice a keen glance under sleepy cover, and rose. "Can I give him any message for you?" said he.

Untroubled the potential criminal met his gaze. "No, thanks," he answered. He was staying away from the Club to avoid Jameson and Bonner. To-morrow at this time he would be far away and in his absence perhaps Time would smooth out the tangle that threatened him so nearly.

CHAPTER XIX

ROY SIMS-EVANS came rather dolorously to the Helouan station to see off his friends, all of whom, he said, were departing ruthlessly from him by the train that bore the *Batavia's* passengers seaward and Homeward. He, owing to the irresistible gaieties of the season and late nights was not as well as might have been wished and the doctors consequently forbade him to think of returning to England for the coming summer. "I, a poor exile!" was the refrain of his song as he leaned in at the window of the Brayton's corridor compartment.

"Well, why did you do it?" expostulated Edith at last. "Every one was telling you all along——"

"Oh, but I feel so fit! It's just Dr. Bayley's perversity!" he declared. "I'm coming all the same!"

"No, Roy!" said a proprietary voice behind him, and they all looked up to meet the smiling eyes of Olive Tregarthen beneath her shady sun-hat. She was twirling a green-lined parasol. "Not *all* of your friends either are going by this train! We for instance are staying another week!"

That was only prolonging the agony, he declared.

Olive gently pulled at the end of the inevitable sketch-book sticking out of his pocket, and having secured it

proceeded to exhibit his latest sketch. Even Mrs. Brayton looked upon it with a softened eye. Edith cried out in pleasure. Just a rock tipped with burnt sienna and a blue shadow beneath it, set upon a creamy drift that had rippled in the wind like sea-sand—it was a masterpiece.

"That's what he got up at five o'clock this morning to go to," explained Olive, and strolled away to bid good-bye to other departing friends, while his tongue was dumb and his eyes followed her light swaying figure for a minute ere they returned to the open book in his hand. This was only a study for a corner of the great subject picture that was to win him his R.A. It was to be of an ancient Egyptian king watching his people raise a city out of the desert for his pleasure. "I hoped to do the armour and chariots from the Museum in Cairo," he said, "and now Bayley won't hear of my sitting in any building for even two hours on end!"

"Cheer up!" said Mrs. Brayton. "I hear you're almost engaged, if not quite! Am I tactful?"

"Oh, quite!" he laughed.

"It's Olive, I suppose?" put in Edith.

"How did you know?" cried the ingenuous youth, and went on to explain that they must wait for some time, firstly until he was better ("I can't have her marry a consumptive!") and secondly because there was evidently going to be time, expense and trouble before she was finally freed from Bilêl, "I don't understand that chap!" said he, rumpling his hair distractedly. "He says one thing one day and another thing the next, and doesn't care a bit when he's shown that he's contradicted himself! He's quite unreliable. Yet he's

rising so quick in the Service too—senior engineer three months ago and inspector now! He never works! I can't understand it!"

"I can," grimly remarked Borrodaile, when later in the day Edith told him of Roy's perplexities during their pre-prandial tramp round the decks while the ship ploughed the muddy waters off the Delta. "Why can't they grasp that the chap is old Bilêl Pasha's nephew! That's the whole story! In old days if he made himself objectionable he knows he'd have just been chloroformed and thrown into a canal. Now he knows he'll never be murdered, so he doesn't care what he does! Since he's alive and Bilêl's relative he thinks he can't be got rid of! In ten years' time—less, if matters go on at this pace—I've no doubt I'll be taking orders from Bilêl."

Edith was amazed not only at this outburst from the quiet Borrodaile but also at the nature of his communication. It gave her cause for deep thought, the result of which settled upon her heart as steadily as dusk was settling on the sea. He went on to tell her of a letter he had read in the Gippy paper that very morning in the train. It was the usual business: bogus signature! It set forth that crops on certain Irrigation Circles had suffered owing to negligence on the part of inspectors, who *said* they were incorruptible but were very comfortably off nevertheless. The very thing to poison an ignorant fellah's mind! And would it be stopped or suppressed? Not at all! No notice taken. Borrodaile himself had read it, interested to see how far the writer dared go in an English publication. He went so far as to name even a district!

"Which one?" asked Edith casually, while the cold grip of foreboding tightened about her heart.

"Hellal, of all others!" he laughed, secure. "Why, that's on Harvey's Circle. You'd as soon think Harvey'd go wrong as the earth out of its course!"

The girl's face flushed and she longed to thank him for this faith and praise. But as she said nothing for such a long time, pacing at his side, he feared he had been boring her and began to apologize. But she soon showed she was not the least wearied of the subject.

"Some one, I suppose, is in trouble though," she resumed, "since that letter has appeared?"

He nodded. "Yes, some poor brute somewhere. A letter like that is never written without a grudge behind it."

"Then there is generally truth in them?" she queried.

He would not go as far as that, but if there was it would come out, letter or no letter. Englishmen's irregularities, thank God, were few and far between, but when a man came a cropper—well, it was a cropper and no mistake! "We ought to be grateful for that!" he said. "It's our safeguard."

Edith wished she could feel as sure of Maurice as her companion evidently did.

While they paced the deck they noticed an officer come up the saloon companionway and pin a slip of paper upon the notice-board. "A Marconi message," remarked Borrodaile. "I'd just like to see what that is, if you'll wait a second." He went inside and next instant he started and called Edith's name. She went in to him at once and read the short message herself.

"Giorgio Ghali Pasha shot fatally at noon to-day."

The old Coptic Prime Minister!

The officer who had put up the message was not yet out of sight, so Borrodaile raced after him to ask for further details, but returned unsatisfied. Only that message had been received.

He gazed wide-eyed at the slip while taking in the facets of the situation. "Shot fatally" meant murdered. The fine old man had no enemies but the unavoidable foes of those in high places. Whose hand had actually pulled the trigger?—where, how? It must have happened, Borrodaile recollected, while they were worrying over their luggage on the quay. Able, kind old man!

"I'd like to kill the brute who did it with my own hands!" he muttered.

The decks were deserted, for the dressing-bugle had just sounded, but Edith remained at the young man's side looking out into the opalescent west where a light blue haze hid the union of sea and sky. It was an abnormal moment and both were much stirred. Suddenly Edith walked forward to the rail and leaned her face in her hands with a little sob.

Instantly Borrodaile was at her side, asking what was the matter. She had mastered herself as soon as the sound had escaped her and did not answer, but leaned her chin in her hands gazing over the burnished sea.

"You remember I told you to count on me whenever you wanted help, Miss Brayton?" he asked very low. "Need I remind you? You are unhappy now."

"Oh, no, I'm not! I was thinking of poor Giorgio Pasha!" she fended, but he was not to be deceived.

"That led you to think of your own trouble," he said with calm conviction. "Is there nothing I can do? I know I've not the smallest chance with you, but I'd do anything—anything at all—to help you or—or any one you liked, out of trouble. Hold up your finger and I'll come if I can be of use!"

Her delicate profile was a little averted from him. She made no reply for some time. Then she turned to him and he saw her eyes were full of tears.

"Why, what?" he said quickly. "Have I hurt you?"

"Oh, no!" she said, and the piteous proud little smile on her tremulous lips went to his heart. "I am merely finding out that I have been a fool and I am taking it hard!"

"You mean the fellow deceived you?" he cried, savage on the instant on her behalf.

"No, no," she answered. "There is just somebody else—nobody can help that!"

He stared between his hands at the water seething by thirty feet below. "You're right," at last. "Nobody can. And I can't have even the crumbs of being able to do anything for you!"

"There may be something to do yet!" she cried. "Would you do it for *him*?" And she went below as the dinner-bugle echoed along the decks.

There is no privacy on shipboard. Borrodaile's cabin was full of men and after dinner the decks seemed even fuller. There were crowds wherever he turned.

After everything that filial ingenuity could devise had been done for Mrs. Brayton, he took Edith out under the stars on the dark forecastle.

"I don't think," he said, "there is any woman in the world for me but you—ever. I am very sorry you are so wretched. I didn't know it before to-day. Reserve can only be read by intimacy. Yes, I'd do what I could even for *him*, and I hope some day you will call upon me."

She stood quiet for some time while the flag-halliards tapped together unseen overhead in the wind. Then she said slowly—

"I promise you I will, if it's anything you can do. It may come sooner than you think."

He took a quick look at her profile draped in the scarf that fluttered round it. "Then you're waiting for something to happen?"

And she bowed her graceful head in assent. He thought for a second of a sorrowing Madonna by one of the Old Masters.

"Well," he resumed, "I am ready."

She put out her hand to him in silence and he took it in both his own and held it without pressure, for he knew her action to be one of mere friendliness. Caresses to a woman who does not care for them lose their character. He had never known that till now. But he did not guess that strange emotions were passing through Edith till she suddenly said—

"Mr. Borrodaile, I wish I could love you! I wish I could!"

He smiled in the dark and opened his hands, letting hers go. "Oh, if you can't you can't! I understand that well enough! That's nothing to worry about! Let us go back!" In truth he had had enough disappointment for the time being and wished to be alone

to think it over and readjust himself for the future. Edith seemed so sure that there *was* a future, that he also began to brace himself to meet what it might bring. In the smoking-room after some time he gradually found consolation in the knowledge that she valued him enough to use him.

"Nice long talk you've been having with Mr. Borrodaile there!" commented Mrs. Brayton on Edith's return when the young man had passed along out of earshot. "Have you decided to marry him yet? The whole ship is watching you two!"

"Oh!" said Edith. This disclosure left her poise undisturbed. "Well, mother, I've decided not to marry him."

"Told him so?"

"Yes."

"He's a good fellow!"

"Don't I know it?"

"You're your father's daughter."

Another comment came from Lucy one morning when Edith met her at the top of the stairs coming up on deck for the day accompanied by one of the two nurses who were her guardians. Edith was in sole possession of the deck, walking up and down. While the nurse prepared Lucy's long chair she stood watching the girl and as she passed said—

"You're with Mr. Borrodaile a lot."

Edith paused and tucked back a tendril of escaped hair into the scarf wound over her head. "Am I?" she said at last.

"My wedding-present," went on Lucy, "will be your promise to me about Maurice. It's at my bank

now sealed up with your name on it, so if I die you'll get it at once. Do you want me to die?"

"No, I don't," said Edith indifferently, as the nurse straightened up and faced about.

"Better not stand too long, Mrs. Jameson!" warned the hospital voice, and Lucy with a flash of indescribable hatred in her eyes obeyed. Edith moved away with a nod and resumed her patrol on the other side of the deck. She did not wish Lucy to die, but she preferred herself to be where Lucy was not, and as she walked up and down the bitterness woke and raged in her soul afresh that Maurice should care for such a woman. After a brief moment's consideration she dismissed the idea that he knew of the worthless promise she had given Lucy out of pity, to humour the ill-balanced brain. How could Lucy use such a document even if Edith chose to break her undertaking? Out of the question to publish it, equally impossible to give it to Maurice or her husband! Then the idea entered Edith's mind that Lucy might not be sane. It was the easiest explanation, and one that her nurses evidently held.

The day-nurse volunteered the information that Mrs. Jameson was not doing well. Something seemed to weigh upon her mind. "I remember you came one day to Mrs. Jameson's house before we left Egypt. Do you know that she had an attack of acute hysteria when you had left?"

Edith had not known it, and was very sorry to hear it now.

"We thought—possibly—you might be able to throw

some light upon the mystery that would help us to ease her," went on the nurse.

Edith looked her square in the face. "I know of no mystery," she said, "and I'm afraid I can't help you. I have nothing in common with Mrs. Jameson."

CHAPTER XX

THE four winds of heaven played lightly on a sunny afternoon about the grey stone gables of Helford Court, the Bonners' domain in the bold yet balmy county of Cornwall. There was a local flower-show to which all his house-party had gone, but Sir Donald feeling sleepy had stayed at home in a long chair on the garden terrace to watch piscatorial proceedings in the bay below, laid out like an emerald and sapphire map before his eyes. All at once round the rocky eastern point came a little white yacht, a cutter, with all sails spread to catch the capricious airs. Like a swan among ducks she glided through the little fleet of brown-sailed fishing-smacks and came cleverly to rest within rope's reach of the jetty to which a loafing fisher-lad or two helped secure her. A slim white figure sprang to land and after interrogation, in answer to which both lads pointed up towards the Court, the figure started off walking at a pace that soon hid him among the trees that leaned down the hill towards the water. A sailor in a white jersey took in the yacht's sails and then sitting on the gunwale entered into amenities with the aforesaid loafers.

Quarter of an hour elapsed and a footman appeared on the terrace followed by O'Callaghan attired in white flannels much the worse for wear and an old hat on his

head that suggested his nationality before he opened his lips.

"So you are the yachtsman who shames us out of countenance, eh?" was Bonner's greeting as he sprang from his chair.

"Shames you? Don't be sarcastic, Sir Donald!" quoth the young man, glancing down at his baggy knees. "I've just come from Cowes, and all my smart duds are in a bag in *My Lady Fair* waiting to go to the wash when I get home to Cork! I *thought*," with sad emphasis, "you mightn't object to my paying you a flying visit, even if I do look a bit seedy! But I'll go if you like!"

His Chief laughed and bade him stay, which playful order the Irishman obeyed with alacrity. "It's dry weather!" said he slily.

"Evans!" called his host after the receding footman, "two bottles of beer—quick!"

"Two! How thoughtful of you, sir!"

"Three bottles, Evans!" said the host. "One I should like, if you can spare it!" and then he explained the ladies' absence. Had he gone with them there would have been platforms, prizes and speeches—a performance at which he jibbed in his private holiday capacity.

Silence prevailed while the beer found a home, and O'Callaghan to his secret horror felt the air grow thick about him with coming inquiries. But there was no escape now. He was looking into his glass as he drained it when Bonner spoke in his keen official voice, quite different from that he had used hitherto—

"How did you leave Harvey?"

The young man raised his eyes slowly and his limpid

gaze seemed to plumb true. He showed no surprise and answered clearly—

"Quite fit, Sir Donald! That German doctor has done the trick. His hand's as good as ever it was. He relieved me at Hellal when his five weeks was up."

The other nodded, but though he did not say so he was dissatisfied with O'Callaghan's reply. His next inquiry did bring a glint of some confusion into the Irish blue eyes two yards away from him—

"Did he seem to be more worried or less than before he went on leave?"

O'Callaghan judged he was about the same—if he *was* worried. "But you never can tell with him!" he added. "Harvey is the most reserved fellow I ever met!" Ardently wishing he had never come, the young yachtsman's eye fell on his henchman's white jersey on the quay far below and murmuring something about "my man" he rose precipitately.

"He's not doing anything he shouldn't?" said Bonner, quietly authoritative. "Sit down, O'Callaghan! It's no use trying to escape—or lying either. You live with Harvey most of your time. You applied for another Circle or the Soudan before you left last month. Jameson refuses point blank to go on the Hellal Circle—says he'll retire first!—and gives no reason. The second engineer Rasul draws up any number of *procès-verbaux* against the local fellahîn! You live with Harvey! Why is all this so?"

O'Callaghan's face was keen and concentrated as Bonner's. No thought of escape was in his mind now. He would fight. He straightened his back and drew a long breath. "I can't say, sir!"

"You won't, you mean? By the living heavens, are you implicated too?"

The blue Irish eyes began to look hot. "I am implicated in nothing, sir! And isn't it rather early days for you to take for granted any one is?" He was full of anger, which steadied his nerve. But he was also full of surprise. This was the first time he had clashed with Sir Donald, and he meant to hold his own.

"You are daring, O'Callaghan!"

The young man knew it, but he was quite decided. "I apologize if you consider I have insulted you, sir," he said. "I spoke, caught unawares. I thought you always stood by your men!"

"You are more daring!"

The young man rose to his feet imperturbable and fearless, yet wary. "If you want that Circle properly administered, sir, dismiss Bilêl."

A short pause, pregnant to O'Callaghan with meaning. Then—

"Why?"

O'Callaghan was standing looking out to sea. At the question he turned and bent his clear gaze full upon Sir Donald's face, upturned to meet it. In the bleached, sun-wrinkled eyes he read uneasiness, so he left the question to answer itself. He then collected the three beer-bottles, and took them off to the house. As he went he debated whether he would not slip away without returning to Sir Donald on the lawn. But the Chief seemed to read his thoughts, for as his foot touched the lowest step of the verandah he heard Bonner's voice call him back.

When he returned Bonner told him to sit down, and began to talk.

It was impossible to dismiss Bilêl without definite cause. He was a native and it was necessary to treat natives gingerly, as after all the country was theirs. Bilêl, besides, was a shining light—had he not an Oxford degree ?—and the public eye was upon him.

"Yes," remarked O'Callaghan, caustic and quiet, "and on his motors too. He's got three now, all Mercèdes. His screw is twenty pounds a month."

But to dismiss one for practising the universal moral code of his nation is impossible unless a clean sweep is made of all the others who do likewise. First, proof has to be secured. That would be easy enough. But —the clean sweep presumed—the posts would only be filled again with just such material as that which was rejected. There was none other. And why make friction and enemies unnecessarily ?

"Meantime," mused the inspector. "Harvey is getting all the blame of the Circle's maladministration."

"And I'm not sure he doesn't deserve it !" snapped Bonner. He was getting restive at so much explanation being required by a subordinate. "None of the other Circles give so much trouble !"

A faint smile flickered for an instant about the Irishman's set mouth, but it was gone almost as soon as it came. To him this was not a very palatable interview. "Have you forgotten the Seventh Circle three seasons back, sir ? Hickman was kicked out over that, and he was a good man."

"Well, we can't fire Bilêl until he does something

flagrant," retorted Bonner, passing over the inference, and asked what O'Callaghan had won at Cowes.

"Only two seconds, but I enjoyed it all. She's a clinker, *My Lady Fair*! I'm hoping for a bit of weather between here and Cork just to show what we can do! Come out for a sail, sir?"

Bonner said he was too old to like dodging sails and belaying ropes. He wanted Cairo's views upon the murder of the Prime Minister. O'Callaghan's news was three weeks old, but that it would be first hand and reliable he well knew. O'Callaghan had gone to the trial, seen the inflated schoolboy who had committed the crime and heard the insinuations of murder brought in court against the English surgeons who had operated upon the victim in a forlorn hope. Also he had seen the poor old father of the criminal, who cried out that he had spent £1,500 upon his son's education and this was what came of it. Very clearly he gave his impressions together with Capper's of the particularly fatuous excuses which had been offered: firstly that to slay an infidel was no murder, secondly that there being no mention of revolvers in the Koran it was no murder to kill with one, and thirdly that as Boutros Pasha died only after an operation the criminal was not to blame.

After the execution postcard portraits of the assassin were sold by the thousand with "Martyr," "Saviour of his Country's Honour," and other suitable inscriptions in Arabic and English beneath. Capper was powerfully attracted by the papers found in the martyr's chemist's shop somewhere down in the Abdîn Street. He had told O'Callaghan—not for publication—that there was revealed a complete manufactory of

bombs, some of which were finished, some still in the making.

"H'm!" and Bonner swore thoughtfully. "Trying to follow the example of their babu brethren in India, hey?"

That was it. With crime already on the increase, said Capper, owing to a vacillating Home policy, it was quite superfluous to allow anarchy to develop into another branch of the Egyptian bay tree. There was a secret society, he saw by the paper he discovered, composed of effendis, Government clerks and officials mostly ("Silly young owls!" he called them), whose undeveloped minds were crowded with undigested theses, and the gentlemen had pledged themselves to compound explosives, use them on occasion and to spread seditious nonsense. Somewhere was a list of the members, and that list Capper meant to find.

The ladies returned, a bevy of white muslin, lace and parasols, long before the two men had finished their political discussion. Bonner caught sight first of the advancing army and sat up in mock dismay.

"Oh, Lord!" said he. "They've brought the whole show back with them!" but it turned out to be only a selection of the Tregarthens, to whom O'Callaghan was introduced with a flourish that but increased the confusion of that bashful youth. Something seemed vaguely wanting, however, and nobody well knew what it was till some one asked after Roy Sims-Evans. Then the mystery was clear—it was he they missed! He had had a chill and was held in the grip of Helouan for all summer. Not even the fortnight he hoped for in August would be vouchsafed to him—so spoke Lady

Bonner on the authority of a recent letter—and he had to spend every night in his very collapsible cot on the roof. No one else was in Helouan but his landlady, a pariah dog and a goat. However, the landlady had ceased to view him with suspicion. She quite liked him, indeed, her demonstrations sometimes gave him cause for uneasy reflection! At this Edith laughed aloud and Olive, who was pensively listening, cast gently reproving eyes upon her.

When all these items of news were over O'Callaghan to justify his appearance invited inspection of his boat.

Olive subsided languidly into a garden chair. "If you don't mind," with a sweet smile, "I'll stay here. I'd be ill if I even looked at her, I know!"

In O'Callaghan's opinion his yacht was not a thing to be despised, but he vented himself only in a gentle jeer: "What, when she's tied up to the quay?"

Olive confessed it. She was the worst sailor imaginable. All through the Mediterranean coming from Egypt she had kept her berth.

"You must be the limit!" said he. "Well, I won't ask *you* to come for a sail then!" and taking Edith on the wing for the house skilfully deflected her into the rockery, where they were hidden from the others, for a brief verbal battle.

"So you are engaged," said he, "to Borrodaile!"

"No."

"Well, next door to it. Sir Donald gave me to understand——"

"Quite wrong."

"Ah!" and he smiled in a manner that she found

irritating. "Well, you saw a good deal of Borrodaile, didn't you? Have you his English address?"

"Yes." Her replies were very short and to the point.

Then he asked her to come for a sail with him there and then. He intended to leave for his home that evening. Having had a tiff with Sir Donald he could not ask to be put up for the night, indeed he scarcely wished it.

"A tiff? What about?" asked the girl, arrested.

His answer took her still more. "Harvey. Will you come?" He was hardly prepared for the penetrating look she gave him as she turned forthwith towards the path that led from the rockery to the wicket-gate which opened upon the road down to the harbour.

"Going to elope?" called Sir Donald after them as they passed the group on the lawn.

"No! I'll bring her back safe!" returned the Irishman.

"Dinner at eight if you are able to be back by then. We'll keep some for you if you're not," was Lady Bonner's parting reminder.

They did not speak till they were in the boat Braddon, seeing a dainty lady coming, was very active, and the result of his labour was a clean white spare sail folded lengthwise for her to sit on. The day was clear and sunny with just enough breeze to let the cutter fly like the white bird she resembled. O'Callaghan steered deftly out of the cove while Braddon kept forward with one eye on the weather and the other upon his skipper.

Edith sat silent till they were out upon open water. Then she asked the question he expected, the same that Bonner had put to him.

"Does it matter what becomes of Harvey?" he countered.

"Doesn't it?" she said. She was gazing up at the black Cornish cliffs topped with emerald grass. Her face was inscrutable. He gave up the attempt to read it, and suddenly took the plunge.

"Since I saw you he's told me the whole story. On the night I got back from seeing you, in fact."

Edith turned her face to him, startled and alarmed, but she said no word.

"Do you know it, or wish to?" he continued.

"Neither," she answered with eyes on the carpet of the little cuddy floor, and that single word told him she knew already more than she wished. This established a sort of bond between them, for he also knew more than he desired, and he spoke next with worry writ clear on his usually devil-may-care young face, spoke swiftly as men do in danger.

"Harvey promised me solemnly he would tell the Chief! I thought he would! To-day I know he hasn't! I don't understand! He knows he's not doing the straight thing, and until he confesses I am involved! If I speak I'm a sneak and a cad!"

"Does he want to—throw the blame on you?" she queried, half to herself and wincing as though stabbing herself.

But he could not accept that. "Miss Brayton, he's in great distress. He's too proud to admit anything's hurting him, but the pressure isn't getting less! It's growing. I'm wondering whether it hasn't just—just thrown him off his centre a bit!"

She also was too proud to show when she was being

hurt. This was like a knife turning in a green wound, but she gave no sign except a sudden paleness that made Braddon wonder whether she was feeling seasick. "Turned his brain, you mean?" she murmured.

"It's so lonely on the dahabeah and there's so much time to think in the evenings—he might not see the thing right after a while—and he doesn't know of your—your engagement yet!" The touch of scorn in his voice reached and fired the magazine of her temper.

"I told you I was not engaged!" she said coldly. "Do me the honour to believe me, Mr. O'Callaghan!"

He met her smouldering eyes without flinching. Here there was no getting away. It must be fought out now between them. He believed that this girl had been trifling with one or the other of two men he cared for and he meant to bring it home to her.

"You told me so—yes!" he returned. "But when it suits their purpose women use subterfuges and quibbles a man doesn't. How can I follow your line of thought or action, for instance?"

"You may follow this: I am not afraid of anything nor of anybody. I'll do what I know to be straight."

He studied her for a moment soberly, then said with a nod of conviction—

"Yes, I believe you will." The mystery of Bonner's deductions regarding her intimacy with Borrodaile he was now ready to leave a mystery.

For quite a long time the cutter rippled through the water that lay before her like a turquoise fan widespread. There was no sound but the creak of the block and the swish of the wavelets. Edith, O'Callaghan and

the sailor at the bow sat like wooden images under the pitiless glare of the sun on the sea.

Suddenly Edith spoke—

"Is Maurice Harvey's life in danger?"

His pause for searching reflection turned her heart cold. "No," he said, "not that I know of, but everything else he holds precious is. Miss Brayton, I blamed you once for not standing by him, but now I see——"

Passionately she interrupted, but always low-voiced in the effort to keep what she said from the sailor's notice—

"I not stood by him! Didn't I help him out of that woman's room by artifice and lying when she failed him? Didn't I go to her after that and swear to her I'd never marry him if only she'd cease writing to him because her letters were copied in the post? How can I stand by him more than I have done?"

The young man was gazing at her open-mouthed. The cold, aloof girl was beside herself.

"I beg your pardon!" he almost whispered. "I didn't know!"

Silence. O'Callaghan did not notice what he was doing till his man's glance and the flapping sails warned him he was bringing the cutter's head into the wind. When matters were set right and she was going smoothly once more the Irishman fished from his pocket a crumpled envelope.

"Let me read you a letter." He crooked his arm over the tiller and smoothed the sheet. No need to ask who the letter was from. She knew. "'I'm afraid,'" read O'Callaghan, "'as you told me at the time, that cheque I gave Ramzy has provoked trouble.'" Seeing

that she knew nothing of the cheque he briefly outlined the episode. She made no comment, only looked hopelessly up at the glory of the white cloud-wrack that floated pile upon pile in the sky. "'Ramzy believes,'" he resumed, "'that I have tried to fool him, so he is furious. He is now hand-in-glove with Bilêl. The bank tell me no instructions have been received concerning a change of signature'"—O'Callaghan broke off to look up at his listener. "I wrote and posted that with me own hand!—'So when Ramzy came along, naturally my cheque was refused. They say they wrote to me about it. Odd both letters should have gone astray.' This was posted in Cairo. That's all," said O'Callaghan, folding the sheet preparatory to putting it away, but she held out her hand imperiously.

"It isn't finished!" she said.

"The rest is—only asking news of various people."

"Whom?"

"You, since you wish to know. When I answered I knew nothing about you. Shall I write again and tell him what I know now?" eyeing her.

She paid no attention. Having secured the letter she was brooding over the open sheet on her knee. "You didn't read this: 'I can't hold them. They would give everything away if I tried to. How long, oh Lord?' You missed that out," and she returned him the crumpled old sheet, which he tore in little pieces and then scattered on the sea. She watched them until they were lost in the distance.

Then—

"Well! 'Twasn't pleasant reading!" said the Irishman bitterly.

"Why should I be given only pleasant reading?" she blazed out. "I've got it all to bear!"

He looked at her quizzically, but sadly too. "You're thorough!" He glanced ahead where the sailor was looking with some concentration. "By Jove, a squall coming! 'Fraid you'll get a bit wet, Miss Brayton. D'you mind?"

"Not an atom!" she returned coolly, the sailor's grin of approval not lost upon her.

"Take the tiller then and get her round to head back to the cove while Braddon and I—it *is* looking black!"

There was a heavy pall of cloud bearing down upon them with a white rim on the horizon. It looked wicked.

Three very drowned rats, two clad in oilskins, jumped out of the spruce little yacht when willing arms had hauled her close up to the jetty over the grey water now whipping its spray over the tiny cove. All the smacks were snugged and riding comfortably at anchor already.

There was no question now of O'Callaghan's going on that night. Lady Bonner would not hear of it, and so he dined with them in a suit of a fellow-guest's clothes while his disreputable flannels were drying in the airing press. The rain continued with tropical violence, blotting garden and cliff, sea and sky into one streaky mush. The wind rattled the window-sashes and the big drops roared on the leaded panes, and inside over the quickly-lighted fire Olive in a filmy muslin gown held forth with considerable animation and acuteness upon her whilom husband's domestic views. While her mother sat smiling by, she criticized his social and legal standpoint with a freedom that amazed her hearers. The wretch, having received all her so-called dowry for

letting her out of his actual house, now demanded another thousand for his final *congé*! She was disposed to challenge that, as already he had demanded copious marriage-settlements for himself and had received them, thanks to Mrs. Tregarthen's wrong-headed generosity (though this Olive did not say).

"No, give it him and be done!" advised Bonner. "It's easiest—much—to give a native anything he wants. The Mixed Tribunals are slow, costly and very uncertain. That extra thousand isn't of vital importance to you, and if you fight he could manage to make the case dangle on for ten years, just to annoy you. You'd not be free all that time, you see, but *he's* got his other wives!"

"Ten years!" echoed the girl incredulous, while her mother obviously considered Sir Donald's views verging on the improper.

"Oh, you don't know the wires he can pull—no European does. He's Bilêl Pasha's nephew. Never forget that!" and the noted veteran of the Irrigation Service slipped lower down in his easy chair so as to put his feet nearer the fire that blazed so merrily in the darkening room.

"How disgusting!" came the incisive verdict from the would-be litigant's parent. Her mind was not as liberal as of yore.

"That depends again on your point of view," he rejoined equably. "To a native nothing is more inexplicable than our moral code. Egypt is like a ball of string that somebody tangled æons ago and everybody has tried to unravel ever since and only ramified till it is too much now for the whole world to clear up!

So there we are!" He paused, but no one spoke. Thoughts held the reins of every mind. "Bilêl, like his nephew," he resumed, "is insatiably avaricious. Cut them down a pound or two and you've made an enemy for life! The Pasha's income runs to five figures, but does he let off a fellah one piastre of the bakhsheesh he considers his due for the water his wretched tenant draws from his ditches—not he! And it's not our business to interfere."

"Yes!" cried Olive. "They are very angry if any one does! I know that!"

Sir Donald sat up. "Indeed! And what do *you* know about it?"

Soon after she had gone to live in her husband's villa she became aware of strong dislike on his part for a Mr. Harvey. Once she heard him say with a face livid with rage that he would not tolerate being interfered with, and that "he would recover that fine if it took him twenty years and his salvation to do it." She could recall the date, place and hour the words were spoken.

"I have cause to!" she said with a shudder. "I championed Mr. Harvey on the spur of the moment. I learnt not to oppose Bilêl then! Mother," turning to seek out her mother among the silent listeners, "I thought I'd never see you again! He hates him so!"

There was a long pause. The rain pattered softer on the leaded panes and the wind had ceased to shriek against the walls of the house.

"Twenty years!" mused Bonner. "Just like them! Richly deserved all he got, too, but I dared not—couldn't—stop his promotion!"

O'Callaghan was watching his face in the firelight from under close-drawn black brows.

"Why not, sir?" he asked.

"Oh, you know as well as I do! I'd find myself involved in a worry of some sort if I did, and my action would serve no purpose! Easier to let things go on as they are!"

"Is it?" quietly said his wife, and Edith caught O'Callaghan's eye with a message of some sort in it that she could not read. A beam of moonlight shone into the windows; a pause had come between storms and the Tregarthens rose to make their way home ere the rain came on again. Edith went to fetch their wraps from the airing-room, and the Irishman accompanied her. He would not be denied.

"She seems very magnetic to some men!" remarked Bonner.

In the bare room full of pegs and warmed to a stifling degree the girl faced her companion composedly. "Well?"

"If you can screw Sir Donald up to the point you ought to be able to save Harvey," he said. "You'd have Lady Bonner with you, I can see. He's retiring in a year or two, so you may be able to make him bear a hand. Otherwise he'd be afraid."

She stood arrested with her eyes on his determined fighting face, the parasols in her hands forgotten. "Afraid of what?"

"Natives, God knows why!"

"Maurice Harvey was not afraid!"

"No, and see where he is now. By the powers, we'll get somebody over that job of me letter to the bank!

I wrote ut and addressed ut—" The only sign of excitement was the increasing burr of his brogue and the steadiness of his eyes—" he only signed ut! How many more of me letters have been opened at the Hellal post office? Let old Bilêl show he knows anything about those letters—and he can't move unless he does!—we'll have him!"

"And if you do, you've made an enemy for life," she rejoined, closing the linen-cupboard door.

He gave her a queer glance and a half-smile as he took some of her load out of her arms. "Sir Donald's old. I'm not afraid!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE oil-lamp on the corner of the table at Maurice's elbow merely lit a radius of a few feet in the general gloom on the poop-deck. The rest of the dahabeah was silent as the grave, for Maurice's lonely dinner was over and the suffragi and cook had long since departed to enjoy themselves at the native café in Hellal town. Maurice lay in his deck-chair with an unopened book upon his knees and his dog crouched close by him, chin upon paws. The feeble lamplight fell across Maurice's Soudanese cotton suit, revealing the loose folds where once it had fitted and showed his close-shut lips and well-marked cheekbones with startling clearness. He was thinner than of yore, but seemed somehow less fragile, more wiry. His hands were once again of equal strength. The smart slap he dealt a mosquito that came singing at him told that.

But he was thoughtful to-night. For one thing he had had a heavy day and for another Rasul, the second district engineer, had asked him when Mrs. Jameson was coming back. He had answered that he did not know, but the mere question made him feel uneasy. The movements of an English lady were nothing to do with a native.

"Then she is not coming for some time, sir?" Rasul had persisted.

"I told you I don't know!" was the response with a look that closed the subject. But now his thoughts ran upon her, and he wondered how she was and whether she dreaded her approaching time of trial or regarded it with the joyous bravery so many women do. How long to wait still? Would it be his child or Jameson's?

"Good God!" said he aloud, sitting up in amazement at himself. Could he ruminate over *that* after so short a time? He had believed himself desperately in love with her and now—found himself calmly calculating the chances for and against her ruin! Ruin it would inevitably be, for Jameson was only waiting, he was aware, to establish the parentage one way or the other ere he acted upon the plans he had formed. Once or twice Maurice had met his eye in the distance at the Club and had read in it relentlessness. Also Jameson had not acknowledged his colleague's nod. But to live with Lucy the rest of his days was now a fate to Maurice, and he wondered what had blinded him all those mad past years when he had cherished her empty, shallow, unchanging face as the acme of witchery. He well-nigh hated her, for he had heard of Borrodaile and Edith and was sure that but for Lucy the girl would never have turned from him.

When O'Callaghan paid the dahabeah a visit between trains on his way south to the appointment in the Soudan that Maurice had asked for and been refused, Maurice made diplomatic inquiries regarding the matter that touched him so nearly. The Irishman only said that he had not heard of an engagement yet. Of Edith's promise to Lucy he said nothing. Such a thing was beyond his experience, and as such better left alone.

"How goes the Circle?" he asked.

"Just the same," with a despondent headshake. It was now late November. All influences seemed to be at rest. Bilêl busy with other affairs probably. When O'Callaghan had seen Edith and asked her how she was getting on she had responded with a headshake also.

From Maurice's looks O'Callaghan doubted whether he would ever meet his friend again—he seemed hipped—and in that belief took him down to the station for company. Maurice went gladly enough to escape the awful loneliness that his terrier lightened by only such a small degree.

"They'll soon be engaged, I suppose," said Maurice, his hand on the carriage door, looking up and down the dusty platform covered by the litter of refuse left by fellahîn now in the train who had been squatting against the wooden roof-supports for hours. "If you hear anything write and tell me."

"You are nearer than I am! You'd hear first!"

"I doubt it," said Maurice.

Slowly he returned to the dahabeah to drink of solitude all the deeper for this short interlude of sympathetic, albeit curtly mannered, society. As he sat alone with his hand fondling Nick's silky ears some long white object shot beneath the awning-fringe to land with a rustle direct at his feet. The dog leapt aside with a startled snap and focussed the thing intently. But it never moved again. It was a newspaper.

Maurice rose leisurely and, letting it lie, walked across to the landward rail and shading his eyes with his hollowed hands from the lamplight behind him, stared

along the dark bank searching for whoever had thrown it with such definite aim.

The row of lights in the lower floors of the houses along the river-side remained unbroken.

"Mîn (Who's there)?" he called clearly across the gleaming dark water that lapped softly between the gunwale below him and the looming mud-bank.

Not a movement, not a sound but the water and the cicalas. Harvey was confident that whoever had thrown that paper had not had time to bound up the bank or run along a shadowed terrace. He must be crouched in the inky shelter of a mud ledge. Maurice decided that to go ashore and hunt would be as undignified as futile. Not so Nick. His senses if not his instincts were livelier than his master's. Also ethics did not trouble him. He had been sniffing deeply and at the moment that his master abandoned the search he took it up. With a rapid volley of barks he tore headlong down the poop-ladder and along the deck forward till he reached the mooring-chains as the nearest point to shore, whence he leaped and, reaching a mud-flat, scuttered through the water and—found his prey! Then began a war-dance interspersed with ear-piercing acclamations every time the gyrating victim, now upright and clearly silhouetted against the row of lights, essayed a kick.

The plank in place, Maurice was soon across and close to the tarbushed, trousered figure that spun so uneasily with the raging terrier snapping at its calves.

"Call back your dog, sir!" came a well-known voice in tones of unmistakable anguish. "He will wound me!"

"You, Rasul!" Maurice was genuinely surprised.

"What are you doing here? Better get back to your rooms, hadn't you? Is it doings like this that make you so unpunctual lately?"

"I am not unpunctual, sir! If I am so much as five minutes late I am put down in the book——"

"Oh, well! Report to me when you first come in in the mornings in future. Good night!"

"Thank you, sir! You are always just. Sir, I threw that newspaper to warn you—to help you——"

"Good night!" and followed by Nick, who cast many backward glances, the inspector recrossed his plank and drew it inboard after him. He went up on to the poop and after a moment's reflection picked up the paper lying there: a native rag much read in Cairo and elsewhere, written in Arabic; but that language it was known he could read. He sat down. If it was flung there for him to read he resolved to be seen reading it. There would be no mistake then that he had learned what it was intended to convey, however he might decide to act afterwards. But he was scarcely prepared for the information upon his own movements that it presented, and the minute Arabic lettering burnt itself as with red-hot iron upon his brain. Schooled for watching eyes he gave no sign, though his emotions ran the entire gamut of which human feeling is capable. For there plainly set before thousands, educated and uneducated, pashas and fellahs—aye, and Europeans too!—stood a detailed account of his proceedings with Mrs. Jameson, at Shepheard's, her house and at Mena. His name was the title of the article, but hers was mercifully withheld. So much decency was left to the anonymous writer.

He read the whole article deliberately through in the

full lamplight, folded it and placed it where he always put the papers he had finished with, then took up the lamp with a countenance ruled to calm and went down to his cabin. Once there alone the harness of self-control was still too strong to cast—indeed, no action could express the shock he had suffered. Some break furniture, others stamp and shriek; he simply leaned across the fixed toilet-shelf and stared his own horror-haunted face out of countenance in the silent mirror. Presently he turned away nauseated by the sight of himself and sat on the edge of his berth. This was the beginning of the end! For hours his mind worked like a catherine-wheel throwing off showers of thoughts like scorching sparks. The watches of the night went by uncounted till grey dawn came in between the slats of the shutters, and then he arrived at the decision to see Bilêl at once. With that he went to sleep, to dream fitful fever-dreams.

Bilêl was in Cairo. This Maurice recollected during his morning ablutions. The crystal early air made his nocturnal ragings seem like a nightmare till his eye fell on the Arabic newspaper that lay yet where he had put it overnight, and then realities came back with redoubled force. Now a paper-weight stood upon it to prevent its possible escape overboard by any chance wind. That was the servant's doing. Maurice satisfied his material needs, wondering whether he was himself or another being altogether. He felt so changed. There was now a necessity upon him to con over every action lest he did something he would regret.

Before he rose from breakfast he clapped his hands to call the servant for daily instructions, and Nick appeared as by signal from under the table in expectation of his

dole—whatever milk was left over. He received it while the suffragi waited. When Maurice looked up, though he spoke even more quietly than usual, the man stepped back before the gleam in his eyes. In his own race such eyes would have been those of a raving madman. But Harvey Mouffettish was not raving.

"I go to Cairo for the day. Look to the dog during my absence. See that the plank be ready for my return on the morrow at dawn."

"The Presence catches the midnight train as before?" assented the man with downcast eyes, but Maurice saw a glance steal towards the weighted paper. He had not intended to mention that incident, but now he found himself speaking almost against his will.

"It is *thy* work that the gûrnal (newspaper) did not go hence with the others?"

"Aiwa, ya sidi (Yes, sir)."

"May thy goods increase!" He rose and tossed the offending paper over the side. It floated buoyantly downstream on the pearly surface of the waters. Harvey did not glance at it. "Lazim te shîl kul zift temelli (It is necessary to remove all rubbish always)," said he.

"Kul zift—ma'aloom (All rubbish—most certainly)!" was the response, given in such a manner that Maurice wheeled about like lightning to face the personal innuendo that pervaded the speech.

Next moment he realized he had made a false step in so quick a recognition of the man's impertinence.

"Khalas (It is finished)!" said he, and sat down to smoke a cigarette, for he was early, not having slept well, and his pony was not due for half an hour. The cigar-

ette finished, he packed his dress-clothes, which he would need if he was going to dine at the Club in Cairo that night.

While out on the canal works in the dust and the sun, both real enough, he still felt like a ghost moving in a world apart. Orders to contractors' overseers, directions to Rasul to be followed until further notice passed his lips automatically, while his real mind revolved white-hot around the pivot of Bilêl. He must see Bilêl —he must see Bilêl, and then—but there his brain whirled. This business must be stopped once for all. How it was to be done never crossed his mind. Time for him at present did not exist, noon and afternoon passed without his notice and he left the train and arrived by blind instinct alone through the Cairo streets to deposit his bag at the Club.

Bilêl was not at home but was expected shortly, the bowab (porter) informed him at the portico of wood painted to represent marble. The chief eunuch, a villainous-looking Nubian, led the way into the selamlik (guest-room) at the corner of the ground-floor verandah, closed the door and left the visitor to wait. Now, only now, did Maurice begin to realize where his impulse had brought him. Was this man here himself—Maurice Dagonet Harvey ? And upon what errand had he come ? His mind had suddenly turned sane again and he thought with a recoil of horror of the deadly little weapon he had slipped into his hip-pocket on leaving the dahabeah. Had he then meant to use it ? Maurice decided to go away and not see Bilêl for the present till he could trust himself more. This flash of self-realization had unnerved him a trifle and he wanted time to recover him-

self. So he clapped his hands. Some one would be sure to hear and come.

A barred window looked out upon the tessellated verandah, empty of all save cigarette fags. The other window of the selamlik was closed and shuttered. The clanging of unseen trams but added eeriness to the silence of the house, which according to native custom must be teeming with life.

No one came, but stealthy footsteps passed the door once, and Maurice half thought he heard a key turned in the lock. He would not put this to the proof, however, for it was a lever-handle which showed on both sides of the door when it was moved. It would not do for any suspicions on his part to be perceived outside. By his watch three-quarters of an hour had passed; the sunset had faded and darkness was upon the land. His chamber was unlit and the glories of gilt furniture and ormolu chandelier were invisible.

Maurice clapped again. He felt he must get away—or know the worst. This was like Bilêl, he thought bitterly now, and wondered what sinister attraction had drawn him into this—was it a trap? A long time elapsed and he sat looking at the travelling stars through the iron-bound window. At last he drew from his hip-pocket his little weapon, turned it over and was taking the cartridges from it to remove possible temptation when he saw Bilêl, when suddenly the room was flooded with light, by an electric switch worked from outside. Quickly he pushed back the revolver. Had some one been watching him unseen? It looked like it, but no one was on the verandah. Perhaps the light click of each falling cartridge had caught a listening ear.

The door swung open before he had time to sit down again on the gilded brocaded settee, and two servants appeared bearing coffee on a tray, followed by the chief eunuch.

"The hour is late," said Maurice, refusing the proffered coffee with a negative gesture. "I will come again."

The Nubian gave a click of his tongue and Maurice saw the other two set down the tray swiftly on the low centre table. Now he stepped back against the wall with quick premonition, drawing his half-unloaded revolver more to threaten them than from any other motive, but they were upon him like tigers ere he could speak. A bullet brought a saucerful of plaster spattering down from the opposite wall as the weapon was wrenched from his hand. A short, desperate struggle ended with Maurice completely overpowered and pressed beneath stalwart knees face-downwards upon the divan with arms twisted across his back. Then the sable pair looked up for orders, but had to wait till the Nubian had rescued the fallen revolver. He nodded to them as he examined it, and then what Maurice dreaded befell him. He made no further resistance nor any complaint, but when he sat up he was flushed with shame. Not a word was said while they searched him and took the remaining cartridges, and then they withdrew with their tray and turned out the light, leaving him in the dark, shaken and breathless. They even left the door unlocked, they were so sure of him now. Indeed their confidence was not misplaced, for the lever-handle was shoulder-high, far above the reach of his pinioned hands. And even had he been able to escape how could he parade the streets

in this pickle? So there was nothing to do but pace the floor while every moment cold reason crystallized the facts of the case. "No surrender" must be his line of action and he must carry it out with unfailing courage. Whether Bilêl would stop short of murder if he knew he would never be found out Maurice was unable to decide.

He had paused at the barred window in the pain of his cramped arms to look out at the friendly Bear in the star-dotted firmament when the room was again flooded with light and a step sounded on the paved floor behind him. He wheeled instinctively sideways to hide his bound hands, but did not look round when spoken to, nor did he immediately reply. Not a word must escape him unweighed.

"Why did you come armed into my house, sir?" asked Bilêl a second time, trying vainly to keep his voice steady. He was standing, when Harvey turned, on the opposite side of the centre table with the revolver which his trusty retainer had taken from the captive in his hand. On the threshold stood Ahmed Kahiri, tense, a forgotten cigarette poised in his fingers. "I warn you, don't move!" cried Bilêl as Maurice turned to face him. The captive, though his soul writhed at the indignity he was suffering, was the coolest of the three.

"There's not much for you to fear, Bilêl!" In the steady eyes was a fleeting glint of irony. "You know why I came!"

"To kill me, sir?" asked the young Turk deferentially. No brutal incivility could have been more cruel, but the Irrigation officer gave no sign of feeling. His gaze never wavered from Bilêl's face. "To kill me! Is it not true?"

"No."

"Yes!" persisted Bilêl a little louder. "You were loading this revolver when my men heard you and took it away!"

"I was unloading it for fear I might be tempted to try to kill you—if you look you will find only one cartridge left. I brought it loaded intending to kill you. Here I changed my mind."

With an almost silent chuckle Ahmed Kahiri came quite into the guest-chamber and closed the door behind him. "Changed your mind! Ma'aloom (Certainly)!" said he.

"Do you expect us to believe that?"

"Believe or not, as you please," answered Maurice, and there was silence for a space. He moved backward till he felt the whitewashed wall behind him with his helpless finger-tips. Somehow the nearness of that wall, its height and smooth breadth, gave him strength and comfort.

"You came, of course," went on the assistant inspector, "because of that letter in the *Phare du Caire*. Well, sir?"

"I came to thank you for—your self-restraint," was the unlooked-for reply. "I am grateful that only my name was mentioned."

"You admit it is true then?" said Ahmed Kahiri keenly.

There was no response. The trams clanged by noisily somewhere unseen. In his almost unbearable anguish, both physical and mental, Maurice at last gave a sign of pain—back-thrown head with closed eyes for a second, only a second.

"You admit it is true then?" repeated Kahiri watching him.

"Yes, it is true," in low-voiced confession. But there the humility ceased. "That's all there is to be said, though! Now this matter must stop!"

"Why?" asked Bilêl too gently. He had marked his prisoner's change of tone, and it angered him. "Why must it stop? You interfered in what was no business of yours. Am I a sheep that I should not resent that?"

"It is my business to see the water is properly distributed."

"And do you?"

Maurice went on as if he had not heard the interpolation. "Ramzy was denied his pump for improper reasons——"

"The custom of the country!" broke in the erstwhile Oxford graduate.

"Possibly, but not ours! I got you fined for that and I would again!"

"You may not have the opportunity," coolly rejoined Bilêl.

This hint of future history was not lost upon Maurice, but the only outward manifestation of its reception passed unknown by the other two. They could not see the nervous pressure of his crossed outspread hands on the wall behind him. It took some courage to go on, but now that was necessary because he could not go back. "Possibly, but others may. You know bakhsheesh is not a recognized factor in English rule!"

The effendi broke out at this. "English rule! How much in our country is due to English rule? We give the land, the taxes and the work! Egypt for the Egyp-

tians! We have wished only to govern ourselves as we like! You prate, you English, about your high morals and your refusal of bakhsheesh! Yet what about the cheque—a piece of waste paper, *you* thought, but I have it, oh, yes, I have it!—that you gave to Ramzy to keep him silent over your amours with——"

"No names, please!" The words came like an explosion and from very shock the young Turk stopped. There was enough of the habit of authority about Maurice yet to forbid the taking of liberties. Bilêl kept the table between them still and never let go the revolver—he was afraid! Though five minutes or less might see the end of his life the savage fighting instincts awoke, burned up and glowed in the captive's heart, impotent and trammelled though he was. He held the reins still! And he gathered himself together to press his advantage. "As for the cheque, I told my Bank to honour that signature, but my letter was lost in the post—strange enough, it was not the first to stray that way!" with keen scrutiny. Maurice saw his shot had told. Bilêl knew something of those missing letters!

"You could not have written it!" began the young Turk rather weakly, but Maurice drove him off that scent. He did not intend to involve O'Callaghan.

"I signed it," he rejoined shortly, "so it doesn't matter who wrote it!"

"I think it does!" smiled the other. "Oh, well, I know, anyhow, of course!" Bilêl was recovering his composure now, as he saw how the strain was telling upon his antagonist, whose face was white and moist.

"I gave that cheque to Ramzy so that he could get free of you," said Maurice, almost unconsciously.

A clear laugh rang out and an ejaculation: "Oh, what a lie!" but directly he had spoken Bilêl's mirth ceased. The air had become charged with thick vibrations of passion through which the clangour of the trams in the distant thoroughfare seemed unable to penetrate. Maurice stood with lowered head fighting the insane fury that possessed him. An hysterical exhibition would not help him in the least and loss of temper meant loss of prestige. And Maurice would sooner lose his life than his national dignity. He mastered himself in silence, while Ahmed Kahiri took off his tarbush as if his head was hot.

Bilêl was sullen. With nothing to prevent his making himself felt he found it next to impossible to stand against the current of Maurice's antagonism. He was not showing to advantage, and he knew Kahiri would jeer afterwards at his failure after the boasts he had made.

"You need not deny anything!" he said at last viciously. "We have all the proof! This is only the beginning!"

"I have not denied anything," was the quiet answer, and both young men were startled to note that there was no anger in the gaze he turned upon them. It was merely a full clear look, blank of any emotion whatever. They did not know it for the sign of exhaustion that it was.

"It may be unnecessary for me to tell you, Bilêl, that I am resigning from the Service as soon as I leave you." He glanced at the door behind which the strangling hands of Death might even now be in readiness. "But whatever you do to me all I ask is that you will spare the lady, who is not well——"

"Ah, yes!" taunted his subordinate, in his element. "Have you settled on a name yet?"

Maurice was now past anger. His sensations were only physical. Spots danced before his eyes, his ears rang, and his hands and arms ached till he fancied them red-hot.

"Will you promise what I ask?" he said. The singing in his ears obscured the response, but he dimly realized it.

"The second article with her name in it went to press two hours ago. The papers will be on the streets very soon."

A tram clanged by, the driver stamping out a maddening rhythm upon his foot-gong and Maurice wondered vaguely whether it was a real sound or a fantasy of his fevered brain.

Bilêl, tired of waiting for an effect that did not come, suddenly clapped his hands to call attendance, and Maurice's nerves jarred violently.

"Oh, we are not going to kill you!" smiled his host. "You are much too useful!"

Maurice made no rejoinder. What was the good? He leaned against the wall waiting for the end, which must come soon, whatever it was. His courage had lasted so far and he believed it would last him throughout. Relief also had its place in his sensations. After all he had *not* abased himself before his subordinates, and they would never forget it.

After, to him, an endless wait, though really only a few seconds, the kavasses and coffee reappeared, followed by the marsupian negro.

"Sit down!" said Bilêl to Maurice, indicating the

gilded, brocaded settee, and the eunuch moved closer, thinking the Englishman meant to refuse. But he complied. "Will you take coffee?"

Maurice looked up at the three silent figures towering above him, ready to operate. Was this how the end came?

"You needn't force it down my throat," he said. "I'm perfectly willing to take it quietly." The cup would obviously be drugged, perhaps poisoned. He hoped the latter. He glanced at Bilêl and Kahiri and saw on both faces a look of expectation veiled by indifference. One more bid he made for personal freedom.

"What's the use of violence? I'll drink it quietly if you loose me."

He might not have spoken, so little attention was paid to him. The servants were busy over the coffee tray on the central table. Abdul Kahiri smoked. Bilêl sat ceaselessly twisting the revolver in his fingers. Its muzzle was turned in every direction. Twice Maurice looked full down its barrel and once Kahiri shifted uneasily out of range.

Then the cup was ready. Maurice felt icy cold as the Nubian took it up in his blue-black, claw-like hand while the two kavasses knelt on the settee, one at either elbow of the captive.

Some of the coffee was spilt on the lapel of his coat. As the servants withdrew, their business done, Bilêl gave orders for the motor to be made ready quickly.

"What is that for?" asked Maurice, not with much hope of answer. But he received one.

"To throw you into the Turf Club! We have had enough of you!"

That brought Maurice to his feet with a cry of agonized pride. "Not as I am!"

"You said I was not worth promotion," was the unmoved retort. "I do not think you are worth respect!"

Maurice caught his breath sharply, but by a supreme effort of will made no vain appeal of mercy. This last horror of debasement must also be borne without flinching, but his struggle for self-mastery cost him the failure of his faculties before it was actually due. He reeled and sank back upon the settee with quickened breath, his darkening sight fixed upon the glimmer of steel as Bilêl still played with the revolver.

CHAPTER XXII

"HALLO, Borrodaile!" greeted Capper as he met his friend in tennis flannels at the Club notice-board. The fair, rugged young man turned at the hail and looked his friend up and down. Capper was in uniform and his riding boots were dusty.

"Where've you been?" he inquired.

"Raiding printing-offices! No booty!" returned the policeman. A buzz like a beehive filled the squat building, and Capper turned his lazy eyes into the interior blazing with electric light. "What a row these polo-chaps make! Ought to be turned out—make a club of their own! Join me in a four to-morrow at the Sporting Club?"

"Men, or mixed?" asked the railwayman. "If it's the first I will—the second I won't! Ladies bore me!"

"All but one, hey? Mind you don't become a bore! There are many ways of losing a lady-love!" He was amazed to see Borrodaile turn without a word and disappear in a stream of incoming members. Capper looked after him, making a mental note not to chaff him again about Miss Brayton. Lovers' quarrel, maybe. He would take such things hard.

The policeman moved to the door and went outside on the steps to get a breath of air. The Club was im-

possibly stuffy. A new moon presided over the housetops and the feathery tamarisks opposite waved to and fro in the gentle night-breeze like black lace, and near by the street flashed with moving lights. On both sides of the road in front of the Club door was a line of motors, dogcarts and arabiyehs constantly embarking or disembarking men in white ulsters. Here and there a lady sat motionless in a vehicle awaiting a husband's return. The aspect of one of these white dresses seemed familiar and Capper crossed over in the dark to see whose it was.

"Miss Brayton!" he cried. She was waiting for Borrodaile, who was dining with them that night at Helouan, she said. No need to hurry him; they had come from the Sporting Club together, and he had paused here to change into evening dress. He knew the trains.

"I met Jameson just now," said Capper, taking his time. "He's been Home and back inside three weeks. He has a son, and he has brought them both out with him."

She stopped breathing for a space and gazed straight before her without a word, her lips parted.

"Whose child is that, I wonder?" His sleepy eyes were quick enough now, directed full upon her face, white as pearl in the cross-lights.

"Why, theirs! Whose else?" she answered airily; but her instant's pause after his query betrayed her.

"I'm sorry to speak of this," he resumed, with unhurried determination. "I know it is painful——"

She denied the imputation with smiling pride that compelled his admiration. "I don't think I understand what we are talking about! If I rightly do, such a

matter doesn't concern me! But, Mr. Capper, isn't such a suspicion as you entertain rather a double-edged tool to play with?"

"Yes, whether true or not."

"Then I beg of you not to spread it abroad!"

It was in his mind to ask why she took upon herself such active mendicancy, but he merely smiled, sardonic: "I never have!"

"Who does know, besides us?" she cried, swift as an echo, her face full of alarm. Capper had stripped her of all subterfuge now, but with commendable restraint he forbore remark.

"Jameson, and maybe O'Callaghan," he answered. "They are safe. But how many natives know I shouldn't like to guess—countless numbers, probably! You know the row there's been over an anonymous paragraph in a native paper!"

"No. What row?"

"Oh, your uncle made it. He went to the Governor-General and I've just come from clearing out the printing-office, where I was in time to catch a second article with Mrs. Jameson's name in it actually on the leads."

"Well?" breathlessly.

"That organ doesn't exist from now on and the original of that document is—" he slapped his breast pocket —"here."

"And where is it going?"

"As soon as I leave you, into the kitchen fire that the Club chef is cooking dinner on now. I didn't think necessary to make its existence known in our police records when I searched the office. One seditious paragraph is evidence enough."

Silence. The whir of a motor grew loud in their ears. Edith's buggy-driver waxed eloquent in his own tongue as a taxi-cab shaved the flanks of his bony steeds, to draw up before the portico of the Club.

"Yes, I should think so," she agreed, and her voice was a veil of weary exasperation.

He took his foot off the step of her carriage. "I've hurt you enough for one night," he said gravely, "but I had to find out what you actually knew of this business. Borrodaile's a long time coming! I'll go and hurry—hallo!"

Edith turned to see where he was looking so fixedly.

From the open door of the taxi-cab a little procession was slowly making its way across the pavement toward the Club steps. The porter carried an insensible person's head and shoulders, while a Greek taxi-chauffeur supported the knees,and the wine-waiter fussed around.

"Who's that? Why in the name of common sense are they bringing him here?" and in two strides the authoritative policeman was on the spot.

The brilliant light from within struck the lifeless face that hung tilted backward over the porter's elbow and Edith half rose from her seat when she saw it. Borrodaile in evening dress came up to the side of the arabiyeh and stood waiting several seconds for her to move over to the other side of the seat and let him mount beside her. Her complete oblivion to his presence surprised him and he traced it to its cause in his habitual grave silence. "Some poor devil's come to grief," he said at length, and she then turned but did not make room for him. "I suppose they brought him here—run

over very likely—because they didn't know who he was. Miss Brayton, what *is* the matter?"

For she had quite risen and was gripping the rail behind the driver's seat, rigid as iron.

"It's Maurice Harvey!" she said in a stifled voice. "Go and see what is the matter with him!"

His hand sought his watch pocket. "We'll miss the train!" he warned her.

She raised her clenched hands in a gesture of despair and anger. "If we miss a thousand trains I don't care. Go and see how Maurice Harvey is hurt and ask if I can do anything! Quick—go!"

With a strange expression on his rough-hewn face he turned from the step of the carriage and strode up into the Club without a word or a glance behind him. When he caught up with it the little procession was laying its burden with unnecessary care upon one of the broad leather seats punctuated with buttons that adorn the vestibule. If they had dropped Harvey he would have felt nothing. He lay where he was put as if he was dead, save that he breathed irregularly.

"Looks like my job!" Capper was saying grimly as Borrodaile came up. He had taken complete possession. "Adolph, go for a doctor! Here, taxi, I want you! Wait outside! Borrodaile, keep an eye on him—don't let him go! Listen if he talks!"

With a nod the new-comer obeyed and moved a little aside with the chauffeur, a little greasy Greek, who began now to grow scared and explain how it all happened. The wine-waiter had found a doctor already, and haled him forth.

"Drugged," at once spoke the medical voice, and he

sought for a pulse. "This is funny!" Deft fingers had turned up the sleeve, unlinked the cuff and exposed a white forearm ringed with purple furrows in the flesh. The swollen hands were burning hot. The other forearm was marked the same. "H'm!" and the Æsculapian glance swept the circle of spectators with concentrated meaning, to come to rest at last upon the eyes of Capper, mere slits but blazing.

"Air needed!" came the policeman's clear voice. "All you people clear out!" The circle melted rapidly. "Any immediate danger?"

"No," confidently. "I can bring him to easily enough. Better to take him elsewhere, though!"

"I must be there to hear if he says anything when he's coming to," said Capper, the inert form half-gathered in his arms.

Borrodaile stepped forward. "Take him to our flat, Capper! It's hardly more than across the road."

"Yes," responded the police lieutenant, turning as he knelt with Maurice against his shoulder. Then he caught sight of the escaping chauffeur. "Hi, catch that chap! Keep him here!"

Borrodaile darted after him, brushing as he did so against Edith coming in. He could not stop, but Capper stared in amazement at the graceful apparition in white muslin gown with a face like marble, in which only the eyes were alive and dark with trouble. She swept in like a resistless goddess, with the murmuring porter in her train. He had attempted to bar her way into the forbidden portal, but the flash in her eyes had scared him out of her path.

"Not allowed? Of course I know that!" she was

saying over her shoulder to him. "I shall not stay!" She saw Capper then. "Ah, are you going to bring him out? You were so long!"

"Yes," began the young man. Before he could say more Borrodaile was back and speaking with severe disapproval to Edith: her entrance unheard-of: she must go at once! Capper interrupted. "Borrodaile, save your lectures for another time! You stay here and take the taxi-fellow's story. Get out of him all he knows and look over the inside of his car, while Markham and I take Harvey to the flat. Come on as soon as you can!"

With that he shouldered his unconscious burden and went towards the entrance and the cooler outer air.

"I think I may be of use," said Edith to Markham, keeping abreast of the policeman.

He looked at her with a searching eye for hysteria, indecision or clumsiness, but found only adamant resolve that covered seething anxiety. "Oh, yes!" agreed he, seeing that she would come no matter what he said.

They were destined to meet the whole world. Before they reached the Club doors who should run into them but Bonner. He cannoned against Capper, who had not seen him, being engrossed watching for signs of returning consciousness in the lifeless face in the hollow of his arm. The Chief of Irrigation nearly upset him, for Maurice was not so light after all.

"Why—what on earth—*Edith!* You *here!* Who's this? Harvey! He ought to be out in district! What's he been doing?"

"That's what I intend to find out!" replied Capper, grimly, and outlined the situation in a few words.

Sir Donald swept a look round the hall behind him. It seemed to be all eyes and extraordinarily quiet, like a beehive petrified.

"Well, anyway, this is no place for you!" he said to the girl, who looked at him with her dark eyes still burning in her pale set face. "Come away, unless you want a worse scandal!"

"I don't care about any scandal!" she returned, her low cutting tones penetrating to the ultimate corners of the hall. "Was I going to be kept outside by any nonsensical rule when for all I knew *he*," indicating Maurice with a glance of infinite tenderness," might be dying?"

To this logic there was no answer possible. All those men were silent, gazing fascinated at her. She broke the tension herself: "Come!"

Capper collected himself first and followed her lead, reminding Borrodaile over his shoulder of the taxi-driver's existence, for the young man had forgotten everything. He stood as if dazed by a stunning blow till his house-mate spoke, when with an effort he pulled himself together, touched the Greek mechanic's shoulder and beckoned him down on a leather seat at his side, while the others went on. He knew now the man whom Edith loved.

The flat was empty, dark and still as a tomb.

"The latchkey's in my left-hand pocket. Will you get it out? I can't," said Capper to Edith.

She obeyed in silence and the key grated in the lock. The door once open, the policeman walked ahead into the pitch blackness with the poise of certainty, explaining as he went. The servant was out, of course! He never was to be found when he was wanted.

"Turn on the switch, Markham!" came swift directions. "It's just beside the door. Ouch! I shall be glad to put this thing down!"

The bare hall sprang into light under Markham's touch.

Capper made for an inner room, which when lit up turned out to be his own, and there he laid the inert figure upon his bed. This room was nearest the kitchen and bathroom, he said. Markham would be sure to want hot water?—with an inquiring eyebrow turned in the surgeon's direction.

"No, cold!" said that luminary. "It's hashish (opium), I expect!" turning up his sleeves and eyeing his unconscious subject, who lay motionless with closed eyes, his limbs sprawled oddly as if they did not belong to him.

"I must undress him a bit," said Dr. Markham. "Get blankets. Hadn't you better go?" to Edith.

"I'll go when he is conscious," she answered with finality, and laying aside veil and parasol proceeded to help him undress the prostrate form. Then Capper reappeared with cold water and the blankets, so Edith withdrew to the window, whence she watched the street, and listened for the first sound of returning life.

It came with a long slow sigh, then words, indistinct at first but each growing clearer. Capper rose from his chair and stood beside the bed.

"Not to the Turf Club! Not as I am!" Sharp shame rang unmistakably in the voice, and Capper bent closer, keen for a name. "I tell you, Bilêl—"

"Aha!" a deep, triumphant note. Here was the name!

"—I will take it quite quietly!"

A receding wave of the ebbing drug carried Maurice back to the sea of oblivion. Silence reigned in the room, Capper and Markham standing both like stone statues above the recumbent figure.

"He's been doing something fishy, anyway!" said the policeman, his voice incisive and condemnatory.

Edith turned from the window quick as a flash and her speech came as swift as her action. "How do you know that—yet?" she said, low-toned, white and savage. The two men stared at her, mute. "You blame him before you know anything! Is this your loyalty? I thought you were his friends! The moment something happens to him is this what your friendship's worth?"

With one glance at Maurice, who was moving slightly, she collected veil, gloves and parasol and slipped from the room like a noiseless ghost ere ever he knew she had been there.

When she was half-way across the hall a low call from the police lieutenant reached her ear. It stopped her, though she did not turn. He told her quite impersonally that she would be informed of all that happened as soon as possible.

Borrodaile came in at the open front door as she approached it. He nodded to Capper with an: "All right!" and, turning, escorted Edith without asking her consent.

CHAPTER XXIII

DRIVING to the station, he sat beside her dumb. As she had a long time to wait for her train he went past the barrier with her, scarcely knowing why he did so or indeed that he was doing so. The train had not come in yet and he stood before her on the bare little station platform, torn between his desire to go because of his discovery of an hour ago, and his longing to stay because he loved her.

"Mother will be disappointed not to see you," she said suddenly, raising her eyes with the beacon of faith burning steadily in them.

"Am I not coming?" he responded, noticing how tired she looked. The greenish-white illumination of the station lamps threw her hollow cheeks into almost gaunt relief. Since she loved Harvey as much as all that, how she must be suffering now! It turned him sick to think of it.

"Well," she took up, "you can't approve of me just now. I am well aware no man could."

"You are mistaken!" he caught her up. "I must ask your pardon for the hasty way I spoke to you in the Club! I had no right to do that, none at all! The circumstances were extraordinary, and in the first moment of confusion I blamed you for doing what I admire you for now! You were right!"

"Men are cruel," she said quietly. "They all thought the worst of him. I knew they would. I—" and she looked up, straight and true—"don't. Do you?"

He caught the infection of her belief. Although the victim was his successful rival, his sense of fairness rushed to her support. "I don't," he said, "either!"

The signals were down at the far end of the terminus platform and they could hear the rhythmic grunt of the engine.

"Not one of those men there gave him credit for being possibly in the right—no, not one!" she said passionately. "Every one blamed him! Where was their evidence?"

"Well, it looked—in the face of it——" he began judicially, but nothing could stand against the force of her argument.

"What are looks—in a country like this? Have they no loyalty and no pity—no benefit of the doubt even? What did the taxi-driver say to you?"

He pulled out his notebook and opened it. "Here it all is. Don't tell it to any one else, for it is police evidence."

The train came in as she read, and the little engine uncoupled and went on to the turning platform. She never stirred nor raised her head as the stream of outgoing passengers jostled by, but read like devouring lightning. Then she returned him his book. "No proof one way or the other there!" she said, taking her tennis racket from him preparatory to entering the train. "Mr. Borrodaile, won't you at least give him the benefit of the doubt?"

He raised her hand away from its resting-place on the

window-sill of her compartment and pressed it to his lips. "I once asked you if I could be of any use to you. My chance has come. Yes, I'll look after Harvey. They can do what they like."

She drew a convulsive breath and clasped her hands. "How can I thank you?" she cried.

He lifted his face with a wonderful smile. "My reward will be knowing you want me to do it."

As the train moved off he wondered for a moment what she would say to her mother about the episode, but only for a moment. Mrs. Brayton would be very angry, no doubt, but to that girl as she was now nothing was impossible, not even the regeneration of Egypt! he thought with a rueful smile.

Sir Donald Bonner had now arrived in the flat. Maurice was still lying dazed under Capper's surveillance, and Dr. Markham had gone. Open doors revealed these facts at the first glance.

Bonner rose from an easy chair in the hall as Borrodaile let himself in, and the expression on his face boded no good for any one concerned. He was in morning dress still.

"I hope you haven't been waiting long!" was the young man's greeting, delivered with inward resentment. He was beginning to endorse Edith's view in earnest.

"Been here, except for dining at the Club, ever since I saw you!" grimly.

"Ah, well, I haven't even dined!" rejoined Borrodaile, shutting the door after him.

The other paid no attention to that remark. "I don't understand Harvey, and I mean to stay here until I do. Capper tells me you may know something."

"The taxi-driver doesn't know much," he answered coolly; "but I have his number in case he's wanted again. How's Harvey?"

Sir Donald had not troubled to inquire, but now he followed Borrodaile into the room where the policeman sat silent beside his half-conscious prize. A dark silk kerchief muffled the side of the hanging electric lamp that was next the bed—so much consideration they still had, thought Borrodaile wrathfully—on which Maurice lay under the blankets Dr. Markham had commandeered. He opened his eyes on hearing footsteps, and throwing off his coverings sat up and put his feet to the floor. One glance he sent under heavy glazed eyelids at the three men whom he knew to be his judges, and then looked anywhere but at them. Only on Borrodaile's face was any sympathy written, the other two were hard as stone. Their dress made striking contrasts: Capper in uniform, Bonner in rough frieze, Borrodaile in immaculate evening dress, and Maurice in nothing much. Holding to a chair-back for an instant to steady himself, Maurice resumed his garments till he came to his coat, which was missing.

"Markham took it," said Capper, "to analyse it. There was a stain on the lapel. The drug they gave you, I expect. There was something like whitewash on the sleeves."

"What am I to do?" said Maurice. "I can't go without one!"

"Take one of mine," upspoke Borrodaile. It fitted quite well and Maurice then moved shakily out into the hall, accompanied by the three, and sat down there in one of the easy chairs that stood at the four corners of the

Turkish carpet facing the brass tray on its stand in the centre.

The electric light that hung from the ceiling seemed to worry him, for he shaded his brows with his hand for a time and then pushed his chair back out of the circle of its active radiance. He knew what was coming, obviously, and to Borrodaile he seemed crouched like a wounded animal unable to get away from its openly approaching foes. Bonner and Capper had taken the chairs opposite to Harvey, so Borrodaile with a stir of pity took one nearer him. The policeman had seized this moment for his interrogation because it was the hour of Maurice's weakness. When less fuddled he would be less penetrable. But he was not altogether defenceless even now.

"I won't answer any questions!" he suddenly said. He turned to Sir Donald. "I'll resign as soon as I can get my papers. Isn't that enough?"

His superior's steel-grey eyes were fastened upon his face like steel to a magnet. He made no sign of having heard, only looked and looked with an unnerving scrutiny, had it been possible further to upset Maurice.

"No, it's not enough!" rang the policeman's voice. "I am in this affair now and I'm going to the bottom of it! I mean to find out if any one can be punished, and if so who!"

Dead silence greeted this challenge. The recipient quivered all over the least little bit in the world, but his drawn face did not change.

Capper opened his notebook.

"I took this down in shorthand, Harvey, as you

spoke the words coming out of the drug—'Not to the Turf Club. Not as I am. I tell you, Bilêl—'"

At the name Bonner jumped. He was the only man who moved.

"'—I tell you I will take it quite quietly.'"

A second's pause. "I don't remember saying anything here."

"You may not, but you said it. They were forcing the opium upon you, of course. What were you doing?"

No answer. Maurice was lying back in his chair absolutely relaxed. Borrodaile began to wonder whether his sensibilities were not deadened too much to realize the import of Capper's attitude. He hoped so. In one stroke his good-humoured house-mate was gone and there remained but a remorseless inquisitorial machine.

"Capper!" said he, "I think the position you have taken up is unjust and unjustifiable!"

"Get it off your chest, old man, if you must!" was the retort. "Tell us what the taxi-driver said. His number first."

Borrodaile's outspoken criticism had taken effect, for the policeman's voice was gentler, but Maurice gave no sign of appreciation. He might have been a small reclining statue of grey granite. He did not even appear to breathe. And all the time Bonner sat watching him like a tiger ready to spring.

"Go on!" notebook and pencil in hand.

At the motor-cab stand by the centre fountain in the Opera Square a big, dark car had driven up and stopped beside the taxi. He did not notice the number and the chauffeur was muffled to the ears. A tall Nubian descended from it, and opening the door told the taxi-

driver to help carry a man who was drunk from this motor into his own. On hearing he would be well paid he did as he was bid without demur, and in lifting the body was surprised to find the arms immovable. (Here Maurice did show feeling. He winced for a second, then lay still as before.) The Nubian told him to take the body to the Turf Club and give it to the porter there. Then dropping a sovereign in the road he jumped up beside the chauffeur and the car leaped at once to high speed and vanished. The tail-board too was obscured. The taxi-driver sought and found his sovereign, then investigated the figure in his cab and himself cut the hands free.

"Got the rope?" asked Capper.

No, the man had thrown it away on the spot into the gutter.

"H'm!" and Capper stared Maurice deliberately between the eyes. "Have you anything to say?"

The Irrigation servant's face slowly turned dark red and stayed so. He moved infinitesimally in order to pull his sleeves low over his hands, which he tucked down between his thighs and the chair-arms.

"I want to see those hands, please!" rapped out Capper.

Maurice, his face still crimson, made no motion, so the policeman rose and took them himself. There was no struggle, but they did not come willingly. However, Capper exerted just enough force to convince Maurice of his own futility. The examination of the wrists over, he let them go without a word, and Maurice, equally taciturn, tucked them down again.

"Must have been in a pretty fair funk of you to keep

you like that even when you were hashash (drugged)!" drawled Capper. "What did you do to them?" Barren pause. "They told you where they were going to send you, eh? You mentioned the name Bilêl. Was he one of them?"

No answer.

"Is Bilêl Mrs. Jameson's lover too?" flung out the policeman suddenly. It was a brutal slash and it struck home in more directions than one.

"Good God!" muttered Bonner.

Borrodaile said nothing. Now he understood! Presently he would interfere, but let Harvey get a trouncing first!

"You went to his house to kill him—and got caught! Was that it?"

The flushed face had turned deathly white, and he rose from his chair. "Bilêl is not Mrs. Jameson's lover!" he said, low and distinctly, then walked to the little balcony that looked into the central shaft of the building and stood upon the sill with his back turned.

"Well?" queried his examiner.

"Unless you torture me I've nothing to say," over his shoulder. "Shall you stop short of that? You've done everything else!" and he rested his hands, shaking like aspen leaves, on the balcony-rail before him and looked over the edge as if measuring the distance to jump. Borrodaile closed up beside him, swift and noiseless.

Capper laughed, though not with true mirth. "Not yet!" he tried to jest.

Maurice continued looking down into the gloom of the shaft, with Borrodaile's arm hovering above his back to

catch him in case he jumped. The marvellous nerve he had shown under Capper's questions, even when obviously shattered by an experience such as he could not be induced to speak of, must react violently somehow. Of that Borrodaile was sure.

"Harvey!" he said quietly, laying a hand on the shoulder nearest him.

Maurice started, spun round and losing his hold of the balcony railing staggered into Borrodaile's arms in a dead faint.

"You've put too much strain on him, Capper!" burst out the angry railway-inspector, as he busied himself with the necessary ministrations. "He had had enough before you began!"

Markham returned at this juncture with the coat. "Hallo, hallo!" said he, "what's this?" On being informed he sided with Borrodaile. Such treatment was inhuman, and the fault would be Capper's if Maurice did not recover, or if he did recover was not sane.

"Gammon!" said Capper, but he was uncomfortable. "I wanted to get out of him what he knew before he realized what he was saying!"

The doctor turned to Borrodaile, ignoring the other two. "If he finds Capper here when he wakes up—well, he'd better not! Are you aware, Capper, he's in a pretty ticklish state just at present and ought to be decently looked after?"

"I'll see to that, Markham!" growled Borrodaile. His face betrayed small pleasure in the prospect.

"Better take care what you're doing!" warned Bonner. "You're dipping your fingers into an unsavoury pie that's much safer left alone!"

The younger man looked at the elder and his ire broke loose at last. "Do you propose to leave it alone then, sir? Harvey's one of your own men! Are you going to let pass this thing that a native has done to him?"

"We—ell, it depends! If Harvey deserved what he got I——"

"By God, sir, I thought you were a man!"

An instant's stupefaction fell like a blow upon the three men present. Maurice, prone, did not count. Then there was a low chorus from two of them.

"Oh, I say, Borrodaile!"

"Here! Hold on!"

But Bonner slowly leaned forward in his chair, his hands clenched on its arms, to confront the younger man as he knelt beside the prostrate figure looking across it, a bulldog at bay over the body of a friend.

A flutter of returning consciousness rewarded Markham's labour and caught Borrodaile's eye. He rose at once.

"Come into the dining-room!" said he.

Bonner stalked after him without a word, and Capper came too. Across the dining-table the two men faced each other again, their eyes steady with passion.

"Explain to me exactly what you mean!" said the Irrigation Chief. Each word came like a bolt shot home.

This opening suited Borrodaile exactly. He had some pithy explanations ready to hand.

"I mean that if you abandon Harvey now you'll hold up your whole Service with yourself at its head to the contempt of every native in the length and breadth of Egypt! They'll think you are afraid to uphold

Harvey because of the damage Bilêl Pasha may do you in the future! And they are about right, aren't they? What motive but fear have you for hanging back?"

Many answers could be made, but Bonner deliberated to choose, in spite of his anger. That his accuser was not in his own Department so threats would be futile, crossed his mind, not that he would have employed them except as a last resource.

"I don't accurately know," he said, "what Bilêl holds against Harvey."

Borrodaile was ready for him there. "The only thing that would justify such action is interference with his domestic affairs. And as far as Harvey is concerned —is it likely? No, the issue is plain! Harvey sat on him for corruption, and Bilêl considers his uncle's protection puts him beyond our reach! Are you going to allow this? Do you support corruption, sir, or do you support honesty?"

Bonner's reply rang true, and reluctant. "I shall support honesty, of course." Then he became official. "I will look into the matter as soon as possible and if I find things to be as you say I shall dismiss Bilêl." (Capper smiled sardonically. Borrodaile saw the point but he was too concentrated to smile.) "I am retiring in a year or two."

The young man bowed very courteously. "Harvey spoke of resigning. I suppose that would hardly be necessary now? He has a good reputation."

Bonner assented definitely and there was no more to be said. Filing out of the dining-room Borrodaile went first, and Capper brought up the rear. In the hall Maurice was sitting up clad in his own coat and nibbling

a biscuit with a glass of whisky and water beside him as Dr. Markham chatted away to keep his mind occupied. The sight of Bonner, and Capper, however, undid all Markham's work. His patient broke off in the middle of a word and got to his feet.

"Now about to-night," began Capper. "You, Harvey——"

"I'm not going to sleep here, anyhow!" interrupted Maurice with unexpected energy.

"All right, Harvey!" said Borrodaile quietly. "Come with me to—" he mentioned an obscure hotel—"for to-night and——"

Bonner took up the tale now. Yes, go there for the night and in the morning go to Alexandria for a week for a change and rest. He, the Chief, would manage about leave and when Maurice returned, fresh and clear-headed, they would talk matters over.

Maurice was thinking foggily. There was a look of resistance on his face which caused Borrodaile to take his arm and interrupt Sir Donald.

"You've got some things at the Club, I saw the bag," said he. "Let us fetch them on our way. I think I can get a few days' leave; I'll come down to Alexandria, too!"

Maurice did not move. His friend's pull at his arm did not even start him. "I haven't said I'd go yet!" he said in a queer uncertain voice that made the others look at him and wonder what was coming next.

"Well, it's getting late!" rejoined Borrodaile.

"Come along now and we'll decide the rest of it afterwards!"

Unable as yet to think out the course dimly mapping itself before him, Maurice yielded to Borrodaile's momen-

tarily superior energy and followed him like a lamb.

"Got a telephone?" asked Bonner as their footsteps died away. Somehow he felt flat. Capper indicated the apparatus without a word and lit his pipe while the Chief of Irrigation telephoned to Jameson telling him to relieve Harvey at Hellal at once and permanently.

The policeman heard him unmoved, but said carelessly after he had hung up the receiver—

"That doesn't look like reinstating Harvey! How are you going to manage? Borrodaile will tell him your promise to a certainty."

"I've a week to think it over. I might put him on another job. Then I won't have to dismiss Bilêl. Capable chap, Jameson! Asked no questions, simply said he would catch the early morning train!"

Capper duly approved of the younger official. Sir Donald's views were no business of his. Then: "Wonder whether Jameson will take his missus and the infant?" he mused.

As the post was a permanency he probably would, argued Sir Donald. They were at the Shepheard's now, having just arrived, so without trouble they could proceed immediately. Before the summer Jameson had given up his house.

"Don't see how you can avoid chucking out Bilêl!" reverted Capper thoughtfully.

"Oh, well, we'll see! It would only be waste of energy! His uncle'd be sure to put him back another way," replied Bonner. "If Harvey persists in resigning I can't keep him, can I?"

Capper smiled. "I should say you could do as you wished," said he.

CHAPTER XXIV

"WELL, Lucy," said her husband as they faced each other across the saloon table on the dahabeah at dinner, "I hope you like this, as it'll be our home for some time—possibly years!"

She stretched her slender neck with its single string of pearls, to look at him round the lamp in the centre of the table. "I do like it already, George!" she answered. "Though we've been here only a few days I feel as if I had never been anywhere else!"

He raised his red eyebrows with a quizzical smile which she, still peering round the lamp, saw and interpreted.

"Ah, you're thinking that sounds strange from me!" she cried. "But isn't *that* all past and done with?" And as if to corroborate her, a small voice wailed somewhere not far away and she rose and swiftly glided out with a swish of satin skirts and an uplifted look upon her long aquiline face. She had filled out and grown to be a woman during the past year. Never again would she be mistaken for a girl. And now her eyes were tranquil.

Jameson sat twirling his wine glass and thinking of his wife, while the same silent suffragi who had served Maurice on this identical dining-table removed superfluous crumbs, glass and silver and placed dessert before

him. Here where the whole boat, every cabin, every chain, every plank, cried out to him of Maurice she could speak of being at home! Yes, "that" did seem all past and done with. So far away was it that when she knew about the fateful paragraph she had no doubt of the issue. He was tempted to be annoyed that she took it so calmly and relied upon him apparently so entirely. Then he had seen that her course of action was the best and easiest, though it might be called brazen on her part and weak on his to acquiesce. To-night was the first time she had ever referred to the chasm that stood between them, or to the scenes that had preceded and followed its openings. After the custom of his cold-mannered, fire-hearted race, Jameson had said nothing to her. Nor when she returned now from her mystic ministrations did he betray his thoughts.

"I must get a pretty shade for that lamp!" she said as her eye fell upon white glass globe and garish flame. "I suppose I could send to Cairo shops from here?" she added, a doubtful inflection in her voice.

"Why not?" said he.

She came behind his chair to lay gentle hands upon his shoulders and stoop low to his ear. "Come and look at baby!" she whispered.

He rose like a man under a spell and followed her out of the saloon and down the dark passage. Once she paused and laid her hand on a door-knob, in the wall, glancing back at him. He saw her long shimmering shape and the questioning look in her eyes, shown by the glow from the saloon whence they had come.

"There's terribly little space unless we can have this cabin," she said. "In fact I must have it!"

His voice rasped hard when he had swallowed. "No, I told you that was Harvey's room!"

Still she pressed. "But there is so little space to keep anything. We might turn it out and put some of baby's things there, mightn't we?"

Impossible. He was firm as a rock. Nobody might touch Harvey's things until he sent word or came himself.

She pouted and went on. That was all the impression Harvey's omission made upon her. To be relieved and yet to leave his possessions *in situ* told Jameson that something was much amiss. Bonner was away upcountry. A telegram to the head office had produced the reply that he had not been appointed elsewhere and was on leave, so Jameson expected to meet him at any moment, ostensibly to collect his things but really come for what? At one time he had ardently desired to do violence to Maurice, but now his outlook had changed. Now his wife was his own, and his child had the crimpy red hair and the china-blue eyes of all the Jamesons.

He had not cared what became of Lucy after he had sent her Home in the charge of the doctor and nurses he had chosen until news came of the child. Then he found himself stirred by impulses he had known nothing of, and he took the trouble to go home and see the boy and settle upon a name for him. It was long since he had thought of himself as a married man and he was surprised himself at his sudden regard for her feelings and wishes. He even held his peace anent his misgivings over Maurice's disappearance for fear of upsetting her. She seemed to tire very soon. His doctor

had given him an unvarnished report of her case from week to week, and he was amazed to find out it wrung him to think of her trial. "She is devoted to the boy," wrote the doctor. So he had brought her back when she was strong enough to travel and—here she was, apparently with all memory of Maurice Harvey purged from her mind.

The nursery cabin door stood ajar, and the interior was lit by a single shaded candle that hung in a bracket on the wall. A middle-aged nurse sat on the edge of a berth softly crooning to the cradle, that rocked slightly on its crossed iron legs, under her hand.

"Nearly asleep," she whispered, and peeped through the mosquito-net. Father and mother stood like statues till she withdrew her grizzled head. "He's off, sound!"

"Just had his bottle, nurse?" asked Lucy, seeing the apparatus lying round.

"Yes, and finished it all, good little mite!"

Lucy smiled, handed her the glasscloth to wipe glasses and spoons with, and herself took up the empty bottle to wash it out.

Jameson meanwhile was gazing fascinated at the little round head and snub baby features. One little arm was upraised curled about the head with fingers half folded into the rose-leaf palm. He lifted the curtain and slowly inserted his own large hard finger into the tiny fist. It clutched convulsively and with a long-drawn sigh the child turned its face upon the lace-edged pillow.

"A—ah! what are you doing?" came the quick reproof,

"I'm not hurting him!" retorted Jameson. "He hasn't opened his eyes."

"I should think not indeed!" with ruffled defiance, though half-laughing too.

For the first time for months Jameson levied a kiss from his wife when they returned outside.

"We'll be cosy enough here, don't you think?" he said, and she nestled against his shoulder for answer.

They stood for a moment without moving in the dark passageway to listen to the various sounds commingle outside—the faint clatter of porcelain as the servants washed up, the soft lap of water on the boat's side and the song of the cicalas on the shore. Lucy turned and went to the saloon at the stern to take up her needlework. Jameson went out upon the covered-in deck and lit a cigar; he felt at peace. To the orchestra of soft night sounds suddenly another added itself: a booted step upon the gangway plank. Boots at that hour meant a European. Jameson stepped aside into deep shadow and heard the footfalls cease before their maker reached the boat's side. Whoever it was must be clearly seen by the servants, one of whom appeared to meet him. Then Maurice's voice spoke slow but very distinct in the stillness, asking for Jameson.

"Yes, I'm here!" said Lucy's husband advancing to the gangway. He lifted the heavy fringe of the awning and saw Maurice, a dim pale figure, on the plank a few feet off.

"Oh!" and for an instant neither moved. Then Maurice found his voice. "I've resigned," he said. "May I come and get my things? I won't be long. I —I am going away as—as soon as I can!"

Jameson, motionless as a man of stone, noted the hesitation in the voice. Harvey approached no closer than the middle of the plank. Evidently his present errand was not to his taste.

"You've resigned!" Surprise rang unmistakably out into the darkness. No echo of the scene that had been enacted in Cairo had yet reached Hellal, or rather the Jamesons' Hellal. Every native in the bazaar probably knew of it by this time. But Maurice marked with relief his whilom comrade's ignorance. "Headquarters told me you were on leave!"

"Who said that?" sharply. "Sir Donald?"

"No, he's up-country. Henniker at the office."

"Oh!" a pause. Maurice did not say that Sir Donald must be keeping back his official resignation. He had sent it in two days before.

"Which am I to believe—you or Henniker?" and a spice of impatience tinged Jameson's voice.

"I've resigned. I want to catch the train back in three hours, so I haven't so much time to spare. Will you let me come on board?"

Jameson assented and Maurice stooped under the awning fringe. As in a telescope Lucy could be seen along the dark passage close to a lamp stitching calmly at a little white garment. She glanced up on hearing their footsteps, but did not move, and in the half dark down the alley the two men looked at each other in silence. Jameson unlocked the door of Maurice's cabin and its owner at once stepped inside and struck a match, whereupon Jameson left him to his task and sought the saloon. He stood regarding his wife until she raised her eyes, deep and liquid in this light under the pencilled brows.

"Harvey has come to take away his things," he remarked after a while.

"Yes, I saw," she returned, biting off a thread. "We can use that cabin for baby's clothes now!"

He heard her absolutely placid tone with amazement and not a little secret bitterness. Scars heal but old wounds ache and memories fade but slowly. Could she cast *him* off as easily as Maurice? he wondered. She had been ready to once. Would she again? No, the child was now her anchor and with the child love seemed to have dawned.

"He says he has resigned," continued he. "Do you know what that means?"

"I suppose he is going away!"

Jameson gave it up, sat down and took up a book. But he could not pin his attention to the print before him. Stealthily from behind it he watched his wife's somewhat sheep-like countenance bent over her white task in the lamplight. Presently, unable to endure the tension, he went along to see how Maurice was getting on and found him on his knees packing busily by the light of a single candle.

"You'll come and say good-bye to us before you go, won't you, Harvey?" said his watcher.

Maurice did not look up. His hands stilled among his folded garments and after a moment's pause he drew a breath so long and slow Jameson thought he was never going to stop, and then held it. "I will, if you wish. I'd like to see——" But further than that he would not go.

"To see our child, you mean?"

That Jameson's hands clenched till the knuckles

showed white did not escape Maurice's uplifted eyes. He nodded.

"All right," said the other, and the tension relaxed. He lingered. "Have you made any plans?" he asked.

"No."

Now Maurice raised his head suddenly. A stir had made itself felt at the forward end of the passage and a well-known voice asked aloud for Jameson. In a flash Maurice had blown out his candle.

"I won't meet Sir Donald!" he said rapidly in the dark. "He thinks I'm at Alexandria. I didn't go there because I've resigned! Don't tell him I'm here. I'll go outside until he's gone!"

The two men stood dead still while the Chief passed the open cabin door on his way to Lucy, whom he could see in the saloon.

"*She'll* tell him you're here!" whispered Jameson quickly, as soon as speech was safe.

"I don't care about that!" was the reply. "I don't want to meet him!"

"What'll you do?" rejoined the other, "I fancy he'll sleep here!"

"Take a walk till all's quiet, then come and take my traps and go."

"As you please," came the response.

An approaching rustle told of Lucy's arrival. "George!" she called in her high voice.

"Good-bye, Harvey! I'm sorry it's happened like this!" and Jameson stepped into the passage. Maurice heard the swift whispered question whether his presence was known to Sir Donald, heard her unperturbed negative in reply and Jameson's enjoinder not to tell him.

Then both went away and faintly came the murmur of their voices in conversation.

Maurice pushed his half-packed bag under the berth, then after a cautious glance stepped out, closed the door and stole along to the outer deck. Looking back he saw the Chief seated in the lighted saloon facing the corridor, but evidently he had seen nothing.

The covered-in deck where Maurice stood was dark as a cavern, though bright moonlight silvered the world outside. Once across the gangway plank he felt better. Not a human soul was abroad, and silent in the silence he made his way through the fields dotted sparsely with sleeping kine to the new canal. He wanted to take a last look at that, partly his handiwork.

In the saloon, cosy with feminine knick-knacks, Bonner sat and chatted. He asked Lucy to prepare a berth for him somewhere for the night. Anything—a shakedown on the floor—would do.

"We have only Mr. Harvey's cabin," she answered, with a glance at her husband. "We're pressed for space."

Jameson said nothing.

That would do, in Bonner's opinion, and she left the saloon to see to his future comforts.

"And how's the Circle?" asked Bonner.

The big canal works were finished the day before and the new canal looked lovely. The contractors must have made something out of it! Bilêl, who arrived from Shinai on the next section just in time to see the culmination, seemed very pleased with life in general and his own in particular. He had already asked once or twice after

Harvey, and Jameson, unwilling to give away his own ignorance, had evaded the point. But where *was* Harvey?

"Oh, at Alexandria! I sent him there with a week's leave," was the easy reply.

"And where is he going then, sir?" Jameson's eyes were watchful.

"Not here. To be always in one groove, Jameson——" and a headshake completed the sentence. But in point of fact Bonner had not decided what to do with him. He did not tell Jameson so, but as yet he had said and done nothing, and Bilêl had gone on his triumphant way rejoicing. Not even in Bonner's office was it known where Maurice was.

Mrs. Jameson returned at this moment to say that the cabin was ready, and Bonner went to put some of his things away at once. She entered with him, the candle in her hand lighting her face with its warm glow, and in view of whose cabin it was and of her rumoured connexion with him Bonner looked at her curiously to see whether she felt anything. Not a tremor, not a thought! Her first action was to open the cupboard and sigh—

"We can keep lots of baby's things in there!"

Harvey had evidently left the cabin in haste, intending to return.

"Ah!" said Bonner on pulling open a drawer in the locker to find a box of cartridges broken open by obviously hurried means. "Mrs. Jameson, will you ask your husband to come here?"

While he went on with his search she vanished with softly swishing skirts. A handful of cartridges was missing, so was any sign of weapon. He closed that

drawer and opened another, and as he did so Jameson stood beside him, come like a shadow.

"Yes," said he quietly, "I saw that too."

In the drawer lay a leather despatch-case locked, but the strap over the flap had been sawn open by a knife.

"Have you any idea who did this?"

Jameson shook his head. He found it so, and locked it all up to be dealt with when the time came.

Reading systematically through the papers in the case Bonner said without looking up—

"Living or dead I'm going over these till I find out all I can. You're my witness. I don't care whether I have the right to or not." In his heart he believed Maurice would not return.

There were two old letters, one from his father detailing the death of his mother, the other from a lawyer relating to a small legacy left him by his father as a younger son's portion of a manorial estate. Also there was his cheque-book and in it the file of Ramzy's £35. With his finger on this Bonner looked up quickly at his subordinate's face.

"What do you know of that cheque?"

"Nothing whatever," was the grave reply. All criticism he withheld, but Bonner saw it was there. "I didn't go through his papers," he added.

The night that Harvey left the dahabeah the servants must have been alone and all the following day. Were they the same—none replaced since? Jameson knew they were all identical. Then Bonner ticked off on his fingers the whereabouts of all the native engineers on the Circle. Only Rasul was on the spot. Bilêl was in Cairo—of course. If it was worth while to cut open this

case some one must have wanted some paper rather badly that Maurice had. Bonner clapped his hands to call the suffragi and the sounds rang like rifle-shots in the confined spaces of the boat's partitions.

"If we're not successful," said Jameson, "he'll spread suspicion through every café in Hellal!"

"I'm going to succeed!" spoke Sir Donald decisively. "I think we have our man!"

The suffragi appeared like a white ghost. "Come in and shut the door!" ordered Bonner, and the man obeyed. Then he stood still, facing the two Englishmen with arms hanging straight by his sides. But his eyes roved and his fingers twitched slightly. None of this escaped observation.

"Who took the letters from this case?" suddenly fired off Bonner.

The impassive suffragi started. "The letters?" he repeated helplessly.

"Yes!" emphasized the Chief. "Who took them?"

Popular native superstition credited Bonner with some superhuman insight. The man slowly turned green under his dark skin in the lamplight.

"Ana (I)," he said.

"Wherefore?"

Hesitation.

"Speak!"

"The order was given."

"Thou art in service other than The Water then! Whose?" This brought the net close.

"Nay, O Excellency! I am but in one Service!"

"He who gave that order," cried Bonner, "did he also give thee the order to leave the case for all to see!

Where are the papers that were in this case? I will go with thee to bring them!"

His fingers intertwined with fear like a shaken child: the man could think of nothing but to obey. Docilely he opened one of the stern windows, that let in a current of murmurous air, and pulled on a string knotted to a projection in the woodwork. Bonner stood over him alert, backed by Jameson with folded arms.

Eventually a small biscuit tin wrapped in oilskin appeared through the window. The tin lid crackled as Bonner opened it. Inside lay, safe and dry, several papers, and he laid them out methodically on the table together with some stones used for weighting the tin. First came two telegrams from Lucy and Maurice to each other. "These interest you, Jameson?" handing them across.

A glance at each signature was enough. "No!" short and sharp.

"Here, stop!" even shorter and sharper, for Jameson had already crumpled them into a ball and was about to toss them out of the open window-port. "Everything must be left as found for evidence!"

"I won't have my wife involved!" The crumpled balls were still poised in his hand.

"Those intercepted messages prove co-operating espionage that some telegraph-clerk will find it hard to explain away! Give them here. There's nothing in them!" and his subordinate, furious but silent, yielded them up.

There to be seen was the identical cheque with the poor crabbed signature upon it, and there bearing the Hellal postmark, but entirely innocent of any other,

was Maurice's missing letter to the bank with instructions for the reception of this cheque in Ramzy's favour. "O'Callaghan's writing! Isn't it?" Jameson nodded. "Good Lord, who won't be mixed up in this affair next?"

"We've about come to the end of it now, sir, I think!" declared the Scotsman. "For my part I'm heartily sick of it!"

Bonner grunted. Jameson had not had as much of it as he, and he was likely to have more too! He continued his search.

Suddenly he gave an exclamation and scrambled with his fingers into the tin again. Here was a find! A list of names and addresses which examination showed to be one of members of the secret, evil society inspired by the late Prime Minister's assassin. This would interest Capper.

"Who put it here?" asked Bonner of the trembling suffragi; but evidently the man did not know of its presence. Bilêl Effendi had given him the box. Written in Arabic and French, it stood clear and incriminating before their eyes. Jameson looked over his shoulder and also gave an exclamation.

"By Jupiter, we've got them now!" said Bonner deep and low. "Here's the name we want!" He would not speak Bilêl's name before the servant. "This'll do the trick without further bother!" He looked up and met the scared eyes of the suffragi. "Khalas (It is finished)!" he said curtly, and the man melted away, excessively glad to go. He understood enough English to grasp that the bells of disaster for some one were ringing, and he fled the boat that very minute, so that the

tattered messenger who rode up on an old bicycle a quarter of an hour later could find no one to answer his hail.

So he boarded the dahabeah and groping about the deck found his way into the passage and happened to meet Lucy at close quarters near the nursery. She shrieked aloud at the unexpected apparition and this brought both Englishmen to the scene like whirlwinds.

"There was no one to hear me," said the man. "And Harvey Moufettish told me to hasten greatly."

The other two looked at each other.

"Harvey?" questioned Bonner. "Where is thy official badge, thou miserable crow?"

The man showed it. In spite of his tatterdemalion looks he was one of the Service men. "The new canal has broken. It is a bad flood. Moufettish Harvey is very wet and in need of rest."

Within two minutes Bonner and Jameson were racing for the works, the Chief on the pony, who bolted most of the way terrified by the archaic cycle that rattled behind him like a pantechnicon.

Overhead the moon, half full, sailed serene among her flocks of silver clouds. Jameson's and Bonner's shadows danced black beneath them.

CHAPTER XXV

FROM far off could be seen points of light that flitted to and from, and a murmur came down with the wind like the sound of a restless sea.

"Good lot of them at it!" ejaculated Bonner as the murmur gradually grew to a confused roar.

Nearer, and then figures became visible like dancing demons, mostly naked, in the red glare of the torches held by children. They ran in organized lines, singing their rude age-old chants, each laden with a sack of earth, or potsherds, or old iron, tied up in bundles with tree branches, which they threw one after another into the rushing current. Bonner saw a couple of boats propped on end and tied with ropes in the breach twenty feet wide that had let a lake through the bank to flood the lush, low-lying fields beyond that lay much below the level of the canal. The moon's reflection smiled up from the surface in ever-changing globules of milky light. The draught was less severe now as the level of the canal was reduced, the water having been cut off, but it still went on and the singing chain of human links continued pouring fascines, stones and rubbish into the mill-race waters as if their very lives depended on their energy. It looked a wide sheet to span, but to see a ripple across from bank to bank put fresh heart into the brown mass

of workers. That was proof a bar was rising. At one time the current had simply rushed boiling through.

"Look, the wave grows! The wall is building again!' they shouted, and sweating laboured on. It encouraged them that the moufettish (inspector) reviled them so cheerily.

"Throw here—here! Not there, thou monkey-pate!" Bonner heard as he flung himself off his panting horse. The cry came from a filthy figure that stood dripping mud on the bank amid the jostle of it all. That was the voice of Maurice Harvey, though but for the authoritative gestures he was indistinguishable from the mob of demons he directed.

"Hallo, Harvey, how are you here?" demanded Bonner across the water in an interval when the clamour had abated.

"I didn't go to Alexandria."

"Why didn't you come to the dahabeah just now?"

No answer.

"I came to have a look at the canal. Lucky I did!" and he drew a long breath. "It was breaking when I saw it and it was seven feet wide before I got near. Then the bank gave way under me and I went into the water. I got dragged by the current through the breach—I thought I was done for. The mud was so slack I sank into it wherever I tried to stand. I had to swim. But I got out at last on the proper side for the telegraph office. I couldn't run for it—I tried, but couldn't go quicker than a walk. So I—I'm afraid I lost some time that way. I got there in the end though, and the night-clerk was there. I wired——"

"In whose name?"

The muddy little figure lifted its head high. "Jameson's, whose else? Do you think I'd have wired in my own?"

"I haven't filed your papers yet!"

This line of reasoning Maurice disregarded, and continued his report. "Then I routed up the villagers and the omdeh (mayor) went on to the villages round about and roused them. They've lost some beams off their roofs and window frames too—in the fascines and refuse down there!" pointing to the water at his feet.

The men's clamour had risen anew under Rasul's direction, and it drowned his voice. The torches flared, the droning chants went on and the procession of laden men and women ran to and fro as in a treadmill. Bonner stood looking on in admiration. Nothing more could have been done by him even with his thirty years' experience of water and its ways. His heart was warming to Maurice, in whose mind all the expedients he saw taking place had been formed and given use.

Not so Jameson. That worthy soul believed Maurice was removed from the Service and it galled him to see so much command wielded by a person departmentally non-existent.

"How long has this been going on?" he demanded, rather curtly. "Why wasn't I told?"

Maurice asked the time. His watch had dropped from his pocket and been torn from his chain while he was battling with the water. Anyhow it would have stopped.

The hour was half-past eleven.

"I saw the breach begin," reckoned out Harvey.

"Two hours!" he announced finally in reply to the

question. "As for sending for you, every man, woman and child was wanted here. When the telegraph runner came I sent him—he's too crippled for use. Will you take charge now?"

"It's what I came for!" drily. No thanks, only that brief rejoinder to the man who had prevented a catastrophe and risked his life to do it. It cut Maurice to the heart, but he never flinched. In view of what had gone before this was natural—only natural. Jameson had kept his wife. What more was to be said?

"I must go to the dahabeah," said Maurice, without feeling. "I won't be there long."

"Good night!" came the answer. Mute, Maurice was fading along the bank out of the torches' light when the Chief shouted after him to know which way he was coming.

"Through the village!" came the faint reply, and Bonner turned to watch Jameson's methods awhile. They were adequate, but they had not the precision of genius that Maurice had shown. Then Bonner set out to walk round the lush, swamped fields to join Maurice and make him talk. From experience he knew there might be some difficulty in that.

In the village, that was full of whispers behind the closed doors of unlit huts, he met the weary inspector coming through the winding dark alleys with the omdeh (mayor) of the village beside him, voluble, speaking as a rescued man to his saviour. Bonner Maurice now welcomed as a means of escape. It was as much as he could do to keep hold of his reeling senses enough to know where he was going, let alone make polite disclaimer to the torrent of compliments. When at last

the omdeh turned back and they were alone with the mud walls on either hand, Maurice stopped and leaned against the corner of a hut for a moment, and Bonner could hear his quick breathing.

"You've had rather a tough time, Harvey!" he said.

There was no response.

That tramp beside his silent enduring companion was the longest Bonner thought he had ever taken. It seemed hours before they reached the dahabeah.

"Can you walk across the plank?" he asked, pausing on the bank to look for it.

"Oh, no, I'll fall in!" came with unexpected acerbity. Maurice had found the plank and was halfway across when he spoke.

A door opened on the boat and a shaft of yellow light streamed across the deck.

"Is that you, George?" said a high familiar voice, and Maurice stiffened in the darkness. He stepped aside and let Bonner answer.

"'Fraid not, Mrs. Jameson! We left him hard at it. The damage is checked, so he may not be long. I'll go back soon. Somebody must be there. You've had enough, Harvey! Come along in!" for Maurice held back. To him this was a well-nigh intolerable situation, but like the rest it had to be gone through.

"Good evening, Mrs. Jameson!" The voice was cool as water. "I am in a filthy mess and I'd only spoil your carpets and cabins. I'll stay out here in the dark if you, sir, will bring me some——"

"No, you don't!" laughed Bonner. He caught his subordinate and propelled him into the doorway. "He's

only a trifle wet and muddy, Mrs. Jameson! Go direct to the bathroom if you want, Harvey!"

A very disreputable specimen of humanity was revealed to Lucy's wideopen blue eyes in the light of the candle she carried. No hat, plastered with mud from head to foot, even hair, hands and face smeared. He did not look at her, but was aware of her shimmering white satin presence in the gloom.

"May I come in?" he asked low. Bonner noticed with amusement his manner was hesitating. Hers was utterly indifferent.

"This chap, Mrs. Jameson," he put in, "has had a narrow escape from a watery grave to-night, and—" suddenly throwing Maurice a look straight as a javelin—"has acted the part of a hero! Yet," the look having done its work, his usual half-bantering manner returned, "he worries now about little things like spattered collars and muddy boots!"

Maurice appeared deaf and blind, leaning against the wall of the passage. Once he shifted his feet and his shoes squelched. Mrs. Jameson picked up her satin skirt, and he noted the gold curb bracelet jingle musically down her slender arm. The one thing Maurice was waiting for did not come—her answer to his request. She was thinking of something else, and what that was now came out—

"Hadn't I better send George something to eat and a coat? He went off in such a hurry!"

"If you like," assented Bonner, watching Maurice, who shivered in his wringing clothes. "Harvey! I can hear your teeth chattering!"

"May I come in?" he asked again.

This time she noticed his question. "Oh, yes, come if you want!" carelessly, and she turned with the candle in her hand. "I must see about some sandwiches," and left them in the dark.

The retreating rustle of her satin gown died away and then Bonner cursed under his breath. That was all she cared—the woman to shelter whom Maurice had gone down into hell, whence there is no resurrection.

"What are you swearing at, sir?" asked Maurice low.

Bonner did not reply, for he could not say he was thinking of Lucy Jameson. "Not you, Harvey! Go and change. Then we'll have a talk in the saloon." He was speaking as to a fractious child.

"No, sir! *Now*——"

"Harvey!" and Maurice went, choked to silence by the discipline that somehow Bonner always enforced. When he reappeared, clean and somewhat refreshed, the Chief was waiting for him in the saloon as he had said. Spread out on the table were the contents of the despatch case, and Maurice started when he saw them. Bonner never stirred, but raised his eyes.

"I went through your cabin," he said quietly, "and found the case in the state you see—cut open."

"You didn't expect me to come back then?" Maurice rejoined. Tense readiness stood written on every line of his clean-cut face.

"Yes, I did!" exclaimed his superior. "Why did you send in your papers when I told you to go on leave? Why didn't you go to Alexandria as I told you?"

"Because I had sent in my papers, sir."

"I as good as told you you needn't resign! I've kept them back! Why did you send them in?"

"Because I meant to resign," said Maurice, looking towards the doorway. He had no desire for this interview and wished only to get away.

For a moment Sir Donald breathed secret relief. Maurice's obstinacy might mean less trouble for him, in relieving him of further perplexity. "Well, I can't keep you if you want to go!" said he, almost cheerfully.

"No," agreed Maurice. His smile was bitter. Unerringly he read Bonner's mind and knew the issue that lay between himself and Bilêl. But he did not propose to enter into competition with the Egyptian for Sir Donald's favours.

"If you resigned," inquired his equable Chief, "what would you do next?"

"I *have* resigned, sir, and——"

"Oh, but I haven't filed your papers! You don't really mean it, do you?"

Maurice made a gesture of impatience. "I *do* mean it!" he cried. "If I didn't mean it why should I say it?"

"Oh, well——" began Sir Donald indulgently, then the look on his junior's face arrested his attention. The easy social mask slipped from his own, leaving something of uneasiness behind it. "You mean to go? Harvey, you're mad!"

"That's my affair!" retorted Maurice, briefly.

"What, abandon a comfortable billet here with as much or as little to do as you like merely because a native——"

Maurice caught him up more than briefly. "Yes, merely because a native——" he repeated, and the edge

of scorn upon his voice brought the blood to Bonner's face. "Go on!"

"Chooses to make himself objectionable! He'll get over it!"

"But *I* shan't."

"You're mad! People are talking now, but they'll soon forget if reports judiciously slur things over! Come now, Harvey, what's the use of making a rumpus?"

Maurice found his temper and his speech. He did not want reports to slur anything over. He himself had tampered with reports for the last time. As to rumpuses, he left talking to whoever liked it. For his part he preferred action.

"Take care, Harvey, what you say!" threatened Bonner.

"I'll say what I choose! Now I am a free agent!" said Maurice, and the two men's eyes met and clashed. Sir Donald looked away first. He had realized with a shock the power that lay in Maurice's hand. With ten years' service behind him he should know what he was talking about—if he chose to speak.

And some one somewhere would be sure to hear.

CHAPTER XXVI

THROUGH the open window came the faint sound of village dogs baying the moon, while the two Englishmen sat silent and thinking hard. Maurice was looking at the papers spread on the table in the lamplight, indisputable evidence of his weak folly in the past. But that was over now. He had practised deception and allowed corruption, had met shame and disgrace, and had faced Death at close quarters. In the past he had been afraid: now he feared nothing. Sir Donald was resurveying his ground, in view of this new element of fearlessness that his former docile subordinate had introduced. Maurice's ten years' experience was a dangerous weapon were he pressed, and Bonner saw that to save the *status quo* of his Department he must deprive him of it. Retention with promotion for bait was the only mode of attack that would have permanent silencing results. Against this new menace Bilêl's disapproval did not weigh the scales. Thanks to the list of conspirators a charge of treason would easily remove him from one sphere of action to that of another—Jourah jail.

And the onus of that deed would quite properly rest upon the broad shoulders of Capper or his colleagues.

So Sir Donald now devoted himself to pacifying this new element of unrest. A light burned in Maurice's

dark eyes that had not been there of yore. He must find out what that portended.

"You're in rather a different mood now," he remarked, "from when I saw you last, Harvey!"

"Yes," came the somewhat drawled response. "I wasn't all there then!"

"You're rather tired now, aren't you?"

"Tired?" and there was a slight sound. It might have been a chuckle. There was no sign of mirth on Maurice's white features.

His expression was one of stubborn alertness. "Yes, I am tired of some things. I want a change."

"You can have that without resigning, Harvey!" took up the Chief. He could not keep all the eagerness out of his voice and it attracted the burning dark eyes to his face. "Berkeley-Souttar of the Shitar Circle has come into money at Home! He's off in six weeks, I heard yesterday."

A short pause. The Shitar Circle was the most important.

"Why don't you put in Bilêl," said Maurice unmoved.

"His career is knocked on the head by this little document! Read it!" and Bonner handed over the list, which Maurice perused with the cool imperturbability that, at one time his outstanding characteristic, had been alien to him for some time. It was back upon him in redoubled force now, like an ice barrier between his privacy and the world's interference.

"H'm!" said he. "Capper will be in his element there!"

Sir Donald received the sheet and absently folding its crease looked at the baffling enigma before him. "Is

that all you've got to say ? " he said, and his tone was disappointed.

" What do you wish me to say ? " returned Maurice.

The Chief gave him up and put a direct question: " Will you take Berkeley-Souttar's place ? "

" No, sir, I won't ! "

" Why not ? "

" Why do you want me to so much ? To gag and chain me down with Service rules that only penalize Englishmen because all the others fly to their consuls when they have a grievance ? No, I won't do it ! I've had enough ! "

Sir Donald had no reply ready. " What's your alternative ? " he asked, driven back on the defensive.

" Anything ! " rang the answer. Then more quietly Maurice admitted that he had not much to stay for, certainly. Turkey or Albania would be his eventual destination, most probably. There was always something doing in the Balkans. Besides, a man could get along there quite easily without such superfluous luxuries as banking accounts.

This gave Bonner an opening, for which he had been looking for some time. He breathed a little freer. " I was thinking of that ! " said he more heartily. " How are you off for cash ? "

Maurice was following every thought of his former superior officer. What he read made him a little impatient, more than a little sorry, and above all weary. He knew the power of the weapon he held, the fear of which was driving Sir Donald hard, but it was in his mind not to use it. He was tired of talk, and insincerity. But the habit of restraint is very strong. His

face presented no trace of the ideas working behind it. "Oh, I'll do all right," he replied.

"I might find a secretarial job for you!"

"Thank you, I don't want one."

A pause.

"Draw your pay to the end of this month! and if you're really going I'll see if I can't commute your pension!"

The small motionless figure leaning against the table lifted its head.

"What, when I'm leaving the Service under a cloud? You can't!"

Bonner laughed. He saw his way clear to getting Harvey out of the country and far away before he knew or made mischief with the weapon he held. "Oh, yes, I can! You don't know everything, Harvey! You take it and go!"

A longer pause than before. Maurice had lowered his head again and was apparently studying the saloon carpet. An infant's distant fretting was faintly audible. The pause had lengthened, and now it stretched. Tension made itself felt and Sir Donald glanced uneasily at his unresponsive companion, wondering if he was unwell. He looked it, drawn and set.

"What is it, Harvey?" asked the Chief.

"Yes, I'll take my pay to the end of the month," came the answer slowly. It was his right and the Service owed him something for the work he had done to-night. But then he straightened up and faced Sir Donald squarely. "As for the pension!" he went on, and his voice vibrated with white-hot passion that contrasted terrifyingly with the chalk-like calm of his face, "I'll

have no hand any more with anything that isn't above board! I'll die first!"

"Harvey! Harvey!" and Sir Donald raised his hand to quell the tempest as by habit, but the discipline that had power even half an hour before to strangle Maurice to obedience would not touch him now. Bonner felt the grip of his authority fail and it shook him further.

"You're very anxious to get rid of me!" went on the freed man. "You won't do it that way! I won't take that!"

Sir Donald sat down.

"I've offered you promotion," he said dully, and passed a hand across his forehead. "What will you take?"

"Nothing!"

"There—there must be something!" persisted the Chief. So after all Harvey knew his power. He was a good bargainer. Tactics were but beginning yet.

Maurice moved to the open window, put aside the string that still connected the biscuit tin on the table to the woodwork outside and looked upon the world without, ghostly grey in the moonlight. He was feeling in need of refreshment, but would not ask for it here. There was a buffet of sorts at the station, where no doubt he would find himself before long.

"Harvey, what *do* you want?"

Had he made answer it would have been one he would regret later, so Maurice was silent, and in the stillness they heard clearly the baby's fretting and a woman's voice soothing it. The sound turned over Maurice's thoughts till the undermost came to the surface. He looked at Sir Donald, and hesitating a moment to

screw up his courage asked after Edith, of whom he had not heard for a long time. "Is—is she happy?"

Bonner looked at him at this. Had no whisper reached him then of her active participation in his recovery two days before?

It was not surprising, however. Borrodaile would scarcely speak of such a subject!

"Happy?" he echoed. "I believe so," indifferently given.

"Is it—a case for congratulations yet?"

"Not that I've heard, but Borrodaile's always at Helouan!"

"Oh, it won't be long then!" said Maurice almost to himself, very gently. Exceeding bitterness was upon him. He had hoped for one last interview before he went, but if what Sir Donald said was true perhaps it would be better not—better not! "Well, it's time I went to pack if I'm to catch that train!" said he, pulling himself together.

And then came the resuscitation of Bonner. He quite sprang to life. Was Harvey really going in this way? why such a hurry?

"I've nothing to gain," rejoined Maurice, "by staying! Good night, sir!" He went in search of his dog, whom he found, tied up and shivering, in the fore part of the boat. Nick's joyous whimper at the first call revealed him. He was pattering back at his master's heels when the thud of a horse's galloping hoofs broke the stillness. They stopped on the bank and there was the rustle of reins being hastily wrapped round the official signpost.

One glance was enough. The moonlight, bright as day,

threw Jameson's figure into relief as if on a cinematograph film. He was in haste. Maurice stood still in deep shadow under the awning and his former comrade strode past him unseeing into the passage, whence his shouts resounded as in a tunnel.

"Harvey! Sir Donald!"

Nick barked and Maurice followed down the corridor leisurely to stop at his cabin. He was far more interested in packing than in Jameson's doings.

A door opened and the infant wail, hitherto subdued, worked in a rapid crescendo to a wheezy shriek. "There now, George, how thoughtless you are!" began the high, well-known voice, but he interrupted with imperious haste in his own—

"There are more important things to see to to-night than minding whether babies yell! HARVEY!!"

"He can't be far off!" chimed in Sir Donald's incisive tones.

The nursery door slammed as Maurice came abreast of it. He stepped into the saloon. "Well, what's the matter now?"

And Jameson thrust into his hand a creased envelope addressed to Maurice in pencil in a very shaky scrawl. He turned it over and over.

"The matter is," took up Sir Donald with forced calm, "that Rasul has committed suicide in the canal and taken Bilêl with him!"

"Yes!" cried Jameson, pushing the damp red hair off his forehead, "I saw him do it! I saw the whole thing! It was so absolutely deliberate and quick! Nobody could put out a hand! Whew!" and he sat down.

Maurice stood with the unopened letter in his hand

looking with a white inscrutable face at the excited inspector. After a good scrutiny he opened the missive, saying as he did so that it was Rasul's handwriting.

Jameson saw him write it, fish the dirty envelope out of his pocket and seal it ere handing it to his own safe keeping.

"That is for Mr. Harvey, sir!" said he to Jameson. "You will promise he shall have it?" And on the Scotsman's somewhat surprised assent he walked straight to where Bilêl stood, picked up some stones and pocketed them and then flinging his arm suddenly round Bilêl's neck rushed him into the swirling water, just where the singing procession of fellahîn were throwing in their rubbish, on the canal side of the upright boats.

There was not a bubble nor a sign of either man and there was no pole or rope to drag with.

When the recital was finished no one spoke for a while. Such a death was not agreeable to think about. It was to all of them the culmination of so much that had gone before. Or was it not a culmination but merely a link in the chain of Fate? If so what would be the next?

"Read out—that message, Harvey!" said Sir Donald. His voice sounded sharp, almost nasal, in the strung stillness.

Maurice swept a space upon the table free with his hand. Some of the papers already upon it fluttered to the floor. No one recovered them. With his dark head close to the white globe of the lamp he sprawled over the table, but ere he began to read he looked from under his brows at Sir Donald and said—

"Rasul was the one straight engineer on the Hella Circle!"

"Read!" exclaimed the Chief. He had seen all expression shut from Maurice's face as from a book that is closed while he ran his eye over the short scrawl before him.

"'HONOURED AND DEAR SIR,—

"'A Court of Discipline has been ordered to sit upon me,'" read Maurice, giving each word its full value, "'and I know that is the beginning of my dismissal out of the Service. This morning the clerk who wrote the letter who is my friend telegraphed it to me, so I know. I am debarred to hold any Government position henceforward, and I am very regretful for your sake as my own. Honoured sir, of course a second-grade engineer is as rubbish in your eyes, but I have loved you a long time!'" Maurice paused a moment, then steadied himself and went on. "'As I have loved I take means to rid you of a pestilent enemy whether you forbid me or not. As I should be separate from you anyhow, I separate myself willingly now. By the time you read this—Mr. Jameson had promised to take it to you and I believe he will, he being just, although hard—'" here Jameson winced as though the dead man had placed a cold wet finger on his warm living flesh—"'I shall be at the bottom of the canal breach with stones in my coat to keep me down and my fingers still fastened in the throat of Mahmud Bilêl, whose father may God burn in Hell. If any will dig us out take him and let me lie. I will it so. I kiss your hand.—Aziz ASMED RASUL!'

"That's all"—and Maurice let the sheet slip to the table through his fingers.

"That's all," he repeated almost unconsciously, and flung himself into a chair.

"What a document!" said Jameson. He recovered himself first.

Sir Donald said nothing. He was watching to see what Harvey would do. To judge by the close-set mouth something was coming. It came.

"I shall be charged as accessory before the fact, I suppose!" reflected Maurice aloud. "And it'll rest on me to save my neck!"

"Accessory before the fact!" echoed Sir Donald.

A moment's thought and the look on Maurice's face convinced him it was true. That brought him raging to his feet. If there was a trial it would mean endless trouble for every one. Nothing must come out, at any costs.

Maurice rose to his feet and stood like a stone in contrast to the other's restless motion, and when he spoke it might have been a stranger speaking with fires of scorn in his eyes.

"You forget, sir, I shall be on trial for my life! Nothing but the truth will do!"

"*You can't!!*"

This from the almost distracted Chief. Jameson stood by with face of wood. The personal application in that cry made him clench his hands, hitherto loosely clasped upon the back of the chair.

"Harvey, tell it all!" he said, and his voice rasped like a saw. "Tell it all, that some things may be done with!"

"You will ruin everything if you do!" said Bonner, and both subordinates looked at their Chief and pitied

him. Was this, stripped to the bare soul, the man they had trusted for so many years?

"Then it must be ruined!" said Jameson, holding out his hand to Harvey.

Sir Donald, his head full of departmental readjustments possible and impossible, did not realize the momentous thing that was passing between the other two.

"Mine was the fault," Maurice was saying when Sir Donald came back to realities, "and I wish the penalty could be all mine too. But it can't!"

He looked at his old comrade, saw the outstretched hand and gave his own to it. "If I don't get through, Jameson, I'll only deserve what I get!"

"Of course you'll come through, man! What are you talking about?" and what Maurice had never seen before—sympathy—looked out of the hard Scotch eyes. "If we all get our deserts who'll 'scape whipping?" he quoted.

Maurice smiled stilly. "You've come through it, with something over. I've only got my life."

"Oh, bosh!" broke in Sir Donald. "We must stop it. If you're so afraid, better go!"

Maurice looked at him with blazing eyes. "I won't!" he said between his teeth.

At this point the dahabeah was boarded for the fifth and last time that night. Nick, idle owing to the paucity of rats, gave ample warning, and in point of fact held up at the plank a trio of native policemen with rifles and a sergeant, obtrusively armed with a pair of handcuffs and a sheaf of papers. They had come under

telegraphed instructions from the headquarters to arrest Harvey and incarcerate him in the local merkaz (police station) pending his removal to Cairo. But Nick, true to canine instinct, refused to allow them on board. Eventually it was their prospective prisoner who secured their safe passage.

The handcuffs were apparently insignia of office, and after careful perusal of each document Sir Donald saw no loophole but that of bail to keep Harvey back. The sergeant, trembling before so great a man, nevertheless denied it, and Sir Donald was fain to yield its victim to the arm of the law.

"I can bail him out in Cairo!" argued he when he and Jameson were alone. Nick, with bared teeth and bristling hair, had elected to accompany his master, and no one said him nay. "I can bail him out there! Then surely he'll have the sense to go! It's much the easiest way! The Department *can't* be reorganized!"

Jameson shook his head. "Deadlock, sir!" said he. "If I know Harvey he won't go!"

The problem of irresistible force versus immovable obstacle was still unsolved by next morning, when the two irrigation officers rode forth to survey the scene of devastation. Sunlight shone hazily through the morning mist that veiled the burnished surface of the Nile, and a quiet breeze just ruffled the roadside palms to whisper among themselves.

Bonner was very thoughtful. He rode in complete silence through the sun-bathed fields of cotton and corn till they reached the scene of disaster. A very fair mob of villagers were there, working with the regular irri-

gation crew or standing about pointing out various features of the wreckage to one another. An engineer, notebook in hand and mired to the knees, was directing operations. Knots of men were digging channels to drain the water from the sloppy fields back into the emptied canal. The actual breach in the bank was thirty feet wide, but of course the canal walls on either side of it must be considerably weakened by the water pressure, though they had not actually given way. The fields comprised in a wide semicircle beyond the breach were ruined: a mass of weltering mud with saklieh posts here and there to show where the water-wheels might be, buried in the slush. Three or four drowned sheep were already being investigated by carrion crows, and kites were screaming and circling high in the blue afraid to come down while so many human beings passed to and fro.

"They are under *there*, sir!" said the engineer in charge, pausing a moment to point to the rough, thick mound that stood in the middle of the breach with the boats' noses just showing, and the corners of Bonner's mouth drew down.

"Oh, Lord!" he said, "we'll never get 'em out of that!"

"A little digging more or less doesn't matter now, sir," remarked the engineer, and called to the diggers before Sir Donald had time to stop him.

"He's right, sir," endorsed Jameson in his ear. "It'll look better to have him out! His people will want it, you may be sure, and questions would be asked if either was left there!"

"Upon my word, Jameson," laughed Sir Donald

shamefaced, "I believe it's time I retired! I scarcely know the right and proper thing to do! I've been in the country too long, that's what it is!"

Thus even Rasul's last wish was frustrated.

CHAPTER XXVII

ROY SIMS-EVANS convalesced steadily. His loss of one lung seemed to be compensated for by added toughness of fibre in other directions. He had withstood the assault of particularly virulent typhoid, that had laid low many a stronger man that spring, and this clear, hot morning he lay on a couch inside a tent of red and white Turkish embroidery on the roof of his landlady's house, with Edith and all the week-old newspapers beside him.

"Oh!" said he lazily, "she understands me better now—doesn't think I want to make love to her every time she helps me up the stairs!" They were speaking of his landlady, whom Edith had met when she asked for Roy, clad in a very dirty peignoir and hair in oily curls that obtruded many wisps. "I rather wish she was savage, as she used to be!"

"Is she too affectionate?" laughed Edith.

The boy hesitated with a puzzled little frown and kicked the light rug off his knees. "Not exactly, but she says I need company and stays for half an hour jawing when she brings me up my Home mail—and—and I can't read Olive's letters while she's there—hang the woman! Here she is again! Ah, encore des letters, madame! Merci, mille fois merci!"

Edith observed the manner with which the waddlesome lady handed him the batch with a would-be arch: "Toujours la même écriture!" and sympathized with the lad's uneasiness. That rolling dark eye gave cause for speculation. The girl watched the last of the trailing peignor into the doorway at the top of the stairs, and rose herself to pace to and fro at the far end of the flat roof. Over the parapet were to be seen all the other flat roofs of Helouan, mostly inhabited by the afflicted, like Roy. Close by stood the cream-and-white pile of the hotel where she lived and passed her days. On her other hand were the roofs of a few intervening houses, and then came the yellow blazing desert, uninterrupted to San Giovanni, that charming café on the bank of the Nile, the gleaming ribbon of the river itself, green fields on the farther bank misty blue in the atmospheric haze: beyond lay the desert again with those sentinel Pyramid groups, and finally beyond all else the hills stretched pink and glowing on the horizon with the glamour that draws so many who are touched with Moses' curiosity. Looking upon those impalpable hills with their hint of lands of milk and honey, Edith was resting her chin on her hands and wishing she was riding forth there into eternal oblivion when Roy's voice recalled her to this world—

"Miss Brayton, do you mind, it's time for my loathly tonic? I mayn't go down to fetch it! I hate to ask you!"

She was ready in a flash, with only a fast-dying dreaminess in her hazel eyes to show where her spirit had been. When she returned successful after a protracted search he was on hands and knees groping after three fluttering

sheets of a letter which the wind had tweaked from his hold and spun broadcast over the terrace.

"What *are* you doing?" she cried, and setting down the medicine glass flew to the rescue.

"Can't you see?" he snapped, faint from his efforts. "They'll blow over the parapet in a minute! Not me—get *them*!"

She captured them, indeed only just in time for one, which was twirling above the parapet breast-high in a miniature cyclone, and then turned to assist Roy, who was seated on the asphalt floor by his chair, unable to rise alone.

"What an awful fool I feel!" he exclaimed, when, breathing hard and pale as death, he was once more safely ensconced in his long chair under the Turkish tent of many colours. "Shall I *never* get strong?"

She laughed. "Don't be impatient! You've only been out of bed a fortnight! Here is your letter, all intact—what's the latest news of Olive?" and as she anticipated there was no further need of consolation. He thereupon read aloud the whole of the three sheet screed she had saved from perdition. Comment was superfluous and also undesired, and from listening to Olive's pale enthusiasms and colourless opinions—what revelations we make of our natures in our letters! —Edith passed, lulled by his pleasant voice above the sadness of the desert breeze, into her own world of intertwined perplexities. She looked up into the turquoise void overhead peopled by faint kite-cries that seemed quite apart from the almost invisible wheeling specks, and wondered, alert with desperation, where Maurice

might be and what he was doing. Under the strain of prolonged suspense the tax of her super-imposed indifference to his fate had become too great for her strength and she would have greeted him gladly had he applied to her. But he did not. Three days had passed since she had left him in Capper's flat recovering from the drug that had been forced upon him—by Bilêl, as she knew now from Capper's letter. Her uncle had been suddenly called away for a short inspection up-country, but before going she had learnt from him that Borrodaile and Harvey were at Alexandria on leave. Therefore she was surprised that morning to receive a telephone message unmistakably in Borrodaile's voice saying that he had been unable to move Maurice in any direction for two days, and now he had disappeared and did she know anything about him ? " Whatever Harvey does he will do quick," was all he could say. " I've had a time with him ! He has gone back to the Circle then or bolted from Alexandria ! " He concluded by saying he would ring her up again the moment he heard a whisper from any quarter. Agreeable news to Edith, to whom Maurice mattered more than anything on earth sentient or insentient. All she wished for now was to see him alive or dead. Her pride was worn through and conventions meant nothing to her. If Maurice wanted her she would go to him, and in some strange way she was aware he was in travail and bitterness and thinking of her. His figure floated before her mind's eyes in a small whitewashed chamber with a stone floor, barred window and door bolted on the outside. And he was sitting on a wooden bench against the wall with arms folded and unseeing wide eyes bent

on the wall opposite. And she knew iron had entered into his soul.

"Miss Brayton!" came Roy's voice, and she started. "You've not heard a word I've been reading!" She confessed the truth.

Now would come marvellings of youth that the loved one's doings and sayings are not interesting to all comers. Not at all! Roy lay back considering her. Though four years her junior Roy was far from callow. Not for nothing was he one of an enormous family for whom trustful parents were wont to declare the Lord would provide.

"Miss Brayton, something has been happening to you for a long time. I've watched it," said he. "You are most fearfully worked up! I'm not sure your heart isn't breaking!"

Under the shade of her wide hat her brows trembled. "Oh, nonsense!" said she, irritably, then she smiled. "Nothing like it! But I am worried!" she admitted, using her fly-whisk. "However, it'll pass, I suppose! Most things do!"

He reached out an emaciated hand to pat her shoulder. "Cheer up!" he said.

"People won't do things! Half the people in the world are mad, I believe!"

"The point is, who is sane?" said he, and judging further discussion to be useless, reverted to his own topic —Olive and his hopes of getting to Europe the following summer to marry her the moment she was free of Bilêl's claims. "Takes such a time!" he fumed. "The chap is so dilatory!"

"The end may come quicker than you think," Edith

offered as consolation, little knowing how true a word she spoke.

In the doorway leading to the stairs there appeared with the breath of haste Roy's landlady, bearing a pencilled word from the hall-porter of the hotel saying that Mr. Borrodaile was calling for Miss Brayton on the telephone most urgently. He would not give his message to any one to keep till her return. A fast donkey was awaiting her below.

Edith tore the bit of paper into ribbons, and by her expression Roy saw this was no ordinary social appointment.

"Good luck!" said he.

"I wonder!" she answered, and that was all she said; without hurry but without hesitation she took her leave.

Borrodaile's message was: "Capper tells me Harvey is in Cairo charged with the complicity in the murder of Bilêl and the suicide of Rasul. He is not allowed bail."

The shock was tremendous. Edith stood still with the receiver at her ear while her world collapsed about her in thundering ruins. She was so silent that he hailed again, wondering whether she was there. Her answer came haltingly, but it left no room for doubt.

"Can I see him?"

It was her capitulation to the assault of circumstance.

* * * * *

Borrodaile arranged with Capper for the interview, which had to take place in the prison, and for once Capper made an exception to the rule of giving a prisoner no information of any future event.

He wrote to Maurice telling him of Edith's wish and

received the expected answer, that he was entirely at their disposal.

So at the appointed time Borrodaile met her and drove with her through the picturesque dirty streets to the open airy Citadel where the prison for Europeans stood. She seemed as cool as a cucumber under her pink-lined parasol, but he saw her bare hands trembling and then realized that she was too quiet to be natural. It was scarcely an agreeable drive. The glare was great and the dust suffocating. Borrodaile asked after Mrs. Brayton, and received the stereotyped answer that she was quite well. Then the girl added: "I've given up trying to make her approve of me."

She went alone with the warder into the silent gloom, while Borrodaile waited outside in the buggy to take her back. As she followed the warder through the echoing building she wondered dully whether they would ever reach any final point anywhere or walk for all time like ghosts between those terrible enclosing walls. However, at last the warder paused at a numbered door and the key grated in the lock.

Edith closed her eyes a moment. The hour of trial had come, and feeling as if about to walk into a fiery furnace she entered.

Maurice was standing where he had evidently just risen from the deal table in the centre of the cell, and the single chair the room could boast stood just behind him and papers littered the table. Light and air came in through a barred window high up set deep in the thick wall.

He was gazing at the door and looked as though he thought she was a spectre risen from the grave.

Thus for full half a minute they faced each other.

The cell gate clicked after one retreating warder, but the other was left shut in with them. He stood in the corner, a watchful, silent figure. Maurice turned and spoke huskily to him a few words in Arabic, to which he responded with a headshake, whereupon the prisoner passed a hand across his eyes and nodded wearily. He had asked to be alone with Edith.

"Oh, Maurice!" said she, advancing with outstretched hands on a sudden impulse. The light of faith shone strong in her eyes and the haunted dread faded in his own, leaving wonder and hope in its place.

"You don't believe I did it then!" he breathed, taking her hands and holding them with an unconscious grip that would have made any other woman wince, but her brows remained clear. "You wouldn't have come if you had believed that!" and he bit his lip, straining his eyes upon her face.

"No!" she answered, and the deep, warm, quiet conviction in the voice he remembered so well sent a thrill of triumph leaping through his veins.

He stooped and smothered her hands in kisses. "How cold they are—like ice!" he said, and the first smile flashed from her face to his like a connecting spark. "What's the old saying—cold hands, warm heart?" he went on gathering the confidence that her presence had stripped from him at first. "Is that about right? Bless you, my dearest!"

Her smile had broadened to a happy laugh as she made her admission with a fine blush.

The warder's presence held him back from closer demonstrations and he set her in his chair at the table,

himself pulling up a rough bench from the wall to it at right angles to her. Thus seated he turned and looked at her, oddly comforted by her attitude. She was looking over the papers spread before her with considerable interest.

"That is my defence—the rough draft," he explained. "I have two months to do it in. It must go back to—to the beginning of things," and now his glance was guarded.

"Ah!" said she. That would not be pleasant. Retrospect seldom is.

"My—my counsel tells me," he went on, hesitating yet doggedly forcing himself to speak, "everything must be in my statement and—and he will suppress what is not necessary. He says I am not a judge of that." He stopped and heaved a long gentle sigh, then looked at her with fluttering eyelids.

"No, I don't suppose you are," she rejoined gravely.

"You know what it is," he drove himself on to say. "It is more than I can bear to write," and he leaned his face in his hands. "When I think of you involved in it all," he spoke through his fingers, "sitting in court, listening to it, I feel I'd rather suffer anything than that. Before you came in I had almost settled to give up any defence and plead guilty and—and——"

"No!" It was a low cry like a stricken animal, and her quick light touch upon his shoulder roused him to look up as a blow might have done. "No, you mustn't do that! I—I knew it all, Maurice!" You are in the right—you must triumph in the end! Oh, it would be too cruel! Maurice, I'd go to the ends of

the world for you! I can't help loving you! Don't break my heart for a whim of folly!" She rose from the chair and made a gesture of despair.

"'Twasn't folly," he said slowly. "It was the toll of the River I was thinking of. If I had—had not been a fool I wouldn't have had to let Bilêl scamp the work and then the canal would have been properly built and the bank would never have broken and Rasul and Bilêl would have been alive now instead of——"

"Lord God!" she appealed, "haven't we paid it—haven't we paid it yet! You've paid your toll, Maurice, you've paid it and I have too! It is enough! We've bought our right to be free! Don't throw it away, dearest! Am I nothing to you?"

He stood leaning on both his hands on the table looking across at her, fascinated. Then the hope came back to his face. "If you think you can stand the revelations there'll have to be in court, I'll fight!" he said. "Think! Day after day to hear me vivisected, Mrs. Jameson analysed, and all the charges of corruption brought against me—could you endure it?"

"Why not?" she challenged unperturbed. "If I was sure of the future I wouldn't care what the whole world thought! I'll stand by you, Maurice, through everything till—till death do us apart!"

"Till death do us apart!" he echoed, and grasped swiftly for her hands again. "You mean, you're ready to marry me as soon as I am free to do it? You'll forgive the past?"

She laughed. "I don't believe in reincarnations! We live in the present!"

He had her hands by now and they were warm and

firm. "I studied Buddhism at one time! There's a good deal in it!" he rejoined mirthfully. "But in the future you don't fear the past, do you?"

Through the grill overhead two sparrows flew in with a whirr and a twitter and sported in the air till they came to rest on the window ledge, whence they peered down with wide sidelong glances.

"Those two little birds have comforted me a lot!" said Maurice. "They come down on the table when I am alone and teach me the futility of looking at yesterday or to-morrow, but I can't help thinking of them all the same!"

"Your yesterday has not been very agreeable," she said softly, "but our to-morrow——"

"Ordeal by torture to get there!" he warned her, but ah! when it was over and to-morrow come!

In their new-found intimacy she showed him the puerile little document she had written at Lucy's caprice, that had come to her that morning in an envelope unaccompanied by word or sign. Maurice was allowed to keep matches for smoking purposes. There was nothing in his cell to burn save his scanty furniture. He lit one now, and together he and Edith watched the little bit of paper break into red flame and shrivel down to black ash. The warder stepped forward, thinking this a case for interference, but the paper was already past recovery.

"Di zift bes (This is only rubbish)," Maurice remarked quietly, and the man fell back to his former position.

Thus perished the last trace of Maurice's infatuation for Lucy. No, not quite the last, for as Edith had shown

him this he now gave her a short missive he had received from Jameson—

"Go ahead. I will back your bill to the very end."

"That's generous," said Edith. "You still have a few friends, Maurice!"

He smiled. "Not where they're expected! Have you seen Sir Donald?"

She had not.

Twice in two days he had been here and any one might think Maurice was his bitterest enemy. Argument, invective and appeal had been poured on the prisoner's defenceless head till after the second visit Maurice was fain to write to the governor of the prison and ask to be excused from further interviews.

"I don't know what has got into him," he said. "He has lost his head altogether. *He* is not being tried! I am!"

"Yes, he is, my dear!" she answered. "Your trial is not only your own—it is many reputations run into one, and his will be one of them! But we will come through the furnace only fused together!"

* * * * *

She was right. Cairo is ringing yet with the praise and blame of the various phases and developments of the "Harvey Case." Jameson, as Edith foretold, consolidated his reputation and a few minor defects of the Department's administration were remedied, Maurice was acquitted and he and Edith after a quiet marriage at the Consulate left amid the salvos of their friends to another country where he had been offered a post, to begin work afresh.

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